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XVI.

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BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

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1887.



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## PART II.

### THE HEIRESS OF CHAMPTOCÉ.

#### XXI.

SCHAFFHAUSEN is a queer old town built in the German style with wooden houses having pointed gables on which the storks are fond of perching, and with fountains of sculptured granite, almost invariably surmounted by statues of William Tell. Tourists seldom stay at Schaffhausen—scarcely even stop there in passing—for the great attraction of the town is not by any means the place itself. One must go half a league away to see the celebrated waterfall of the Rhine; and people who are in a hurry generally prefer to put up at one of the superb hotels which Swiss enterprise has raised just above the cataract. From the dining-room of one of these caravanseries you can admire the splendid sight, while lunching, and after your coffee you can go on by train to Zurich. However, such persons as do not look upon Switzerland as though it were mere stage scenery, enjoy passing three or four days at the “Swan” or the “Pike,” two good inns in the old style where dinner is served at one o’clock, and where there is no risk of encountering English people.

This course had been followed by the Mornac family, now consisting of four persons—the ex-notary, his wife, Madame de Mathis, and André. Since the events which had saddened their stay in Normandy, time had peacefully slipped by in the charming abode in the Rue d’Assas, where Noridet’s victims had met with such cordial hospitality, and on the advent of spring, the physician who attended Madame Mathis had advised a change of air. So a trip to Switzerland was agreed upon.

The poor paralytic was gradually recovering her strength, but she had not yet recovered her speech, and in her condition she required the utmost care. So after a brief stay at the “Swan,” the Mornacs had taken a chalet at the entrance of the town, from a worthy Switzer whose terms were remarkably high. This chalet was coquettishly perched on the margin of the river, the blue water which flowed from the Gothard glaciers running by at the end of the lawn.

One fresh May morning the sun was gilding the huge rocks athwart the stream, the birds were carolling gaily on the sprouting trees, and the Rhine darted along past the daisy decked bank, glittering like a silver arrow.

The inmates of the chalet being early risers, M. Mornac had gone off at dawn with his alpenstock to take a long walk on the Basle road, and Madame de Mathis, reclining in a large arm-chair, which had been rolled up to the window, was gazing affectionately at Andrée, her god-daughter, who was seated beside Madame Mornac, in a little boat moored to the bank. The young girl was very fond of this place, where she could read and embroider without being stared at by the German students who lounged about on the road, smoking their porcelain pipes. She spent many an hour there, thinking, listening to the roaring of the cataract, and watching the water break against the dusky rocks. She thought, perhaps, of the sea beating against the cliff at Biville, where she had so nearly lost her life.

Madame Mornac, whose nature was much less poetic, would have preferred the firmer soil of the garden, and it was not without fear that she followed her favourite into the fragile skiff. That morning, however, she had made up her mind to run the risk, and bravely perched at the bow of the boat, she was working away at a cushion intended for her much-loved invalid. Andrée had brought a volume of Lamartine, but the book remained open on her knees, and while her eyes absently followed the lines, her thoughts fled from the peaceful spot which failed to speak to her of the past.

"My child," said Madame Mornac suddenly, "you will really end by making me melancholy. I really don't know what to invent to cheer you up a little."

"How can you imagine that I feel bored or sorrowful near you?" replied the young girl gently. "I have never been so happy."

"That is all talk! I have been young myself, and I know all about the sadness peculiar to your age. I'll venture to say that you are still thinking of the descendant of the lords of Monville." On hearing this Andrée turned pale and tears came into her eyes. "Come, my pet," added the old lady, "you must not grieve. You know very well that I don't mean to hurt your feelings. But how can I help saying what I do? I never see you sad without regretting that stupid idea of Mornac's in taking us to La Beaudonnière, and my still more foolish whim in taking you on to the beach that day when the poor fellow fell upon us from the clouds, as it were."

"He is dead, madame," said Andrée, sadly.

"That is what no one knows, as nobody has ever heard anything of him since he escaped from the prison at Dieppe; but, dead or alive, I hope that we shall never see him again, for all that story about Count d'Alcamo's death never seemed very clear to me."

"Jean de Monville was innocent."

"I daresay he was; at all events so much the better for him. But I have something else to think about at present; for, you know, mademoiselle, that I am going to find a husband for you before the year is over." Madame Mornac smiled so pleasantly as she made this direct attack, that the young girl hesitated about raising any objection. "If it were only to enrage that bad fellow Noridet, I should like to do it," gaily resumed the notary's wife. "Would you believe that there are people in Paris who actually make a fuss over him?—those Brossins, among others, with that good-for-nothing daughter of theirs, who, so people say, is head-over-heels in love with the handsome Jules."

Andrée had started at the mention of Noridet's name.

"But now that I think of it, my dear girl, I must tell you that last

evening, at dusk, as I came out of the church, I saw a gentleman who looked very much like him."

"I had the same fancy on the night of our arrival here," said Andrée. "I could not sleep, and was looking out of my window, when I saw a man pass along who resembled him very much."

"Well, I must tell Mornac to be on his guard, and you must be careful, too."

"What can I have to fear from him?" asked the young girl, with a mournful smile.

"Good heavens! who can tell what he might do? If ever poor Monsieur de Mathis's will were found, Noridet would no longer be the heir, and he has every interest in putting you and your godmother out of the way."

"What! Do you think that he would commit a crime?"

"I don't think anything. But still I feel sure that, if you fell into the Rhine, and he were on the shore, he would not plunge into the water to fish you out," said Madame Mornac, laughing.

"You frighten me, madame," said Andrée, lowering her voice. "Suppose some one were listening! Just now, behind that fence, I thought that I saw something move."

The garden of the chalet was unprotected towards the stream, though it was shut in on both sides by a fence of moderate height, the boat being secured to a picket, up stream, by means of a very strong rope. "Come, my dear girl, you must not let your imagination run away with you like that," now said Madame Mornac. "Switzerland is the most moral country in the world; Monsieur Jules, at the present moment, is far from thinking about Schaffhausen, and I can assure you that—"

The notary's wife stopped short, however, for Andrée had started to her feet, exclaiming: "Good heavens! the rope has been cut!"

It was too true. The boat was no longer secured to its moorings, and was drifting away. "The waterfall! We are lost!" cried the young girl, hiding her face in her hands.

Madame Mornac did not at once realise the full extent of their danger. The current, though rapid hereabouts, had not the force which it acquired further on, and the boat was drifting slowly. The bank, moreover, formed a kind of cape jutting out into the river, and although ahead of this cape the shore was some yards away, it might be reached again by a few strokes of the oar. Andrée, after the first moment of fright, thought of this means of salvation, and stooped down to take up the oars which, on the evening before, she had seen lying at the bottom of the boat. But they were no longer there! "We have but one chance," said she, with emotion, "we must fling ourselves into the water, and try to swim ashore. I can swim a little, and I will keep you up."

As she spoke, the courageous girl rose and held out her hand to Madame Mornac; but the good lady was not very agile, and, in spite of her natural vivacity she did not promptly make up her mind. "My dear child," she cried, as she looked at the stream, "I should surely be drowned, and you with me."

Andrée, of a certainty, could have reached the shore by swimming. Without being a first-class swimmer she was, nevertheless, able to keep herself up in the water, and make a few strokes, but she would not abandon her dear protectress, and the idea of saving herself alone did not even enter her mind. She sank, rather than seated herself, upon the boat-bench, faintly saying: "Yes, we are going to our death."

"You exaggerate the danger, my poor Andrée!" replied Madame Mornac. "Some one must see us from the shore and will come to our help. Besides, the cataract is at least half a league off, and every day the boats cross the Rhine under our windows."

"Ah, madame, have you forgotten what a boatman told Monsieur Mornac yesterday? Didn't he say that our cottage was placed at the extreme limit at which any one could struggle against the current?"

"Yes—yes—that is true—I remember it now," stammered Madame Mornac, who had turned very pale.

"And that story he told us about those two young men who were carried away while bathing."

"Yes, you are right, and we must try to swim. I am very heavy and shall perhaps sink. What does that matter? You, at all events, will be saved—"

"It is already too late," said Andrée, sadly.

And, indeed, the unfortunate women had lost precious time. The shore had grown perceptibly further off, and the force of the current was drawing the boat into the middle of the stream. The chalet had already disappeared from view behind a rock, and cliffs began to rise on either side of the Rhine.

"Look!" resumed the young girl, pointing to the high banks which seemed to fly past to right and left with increasing rapidity.

"We must call out at the pitch of our voices—some one will hear us—some one will come—we cannot perish like this!" And thereupon Madame Mornac made the rocks re-echo with her desperate cries of "Help! help! Save us! save us!"

No one replied. At this early hour there was but little chance that some daring tourist would be amusing himself by climbing the wooded heights overlooking the stream; and, indeed, had he been the boldest and strongest of men, he could not have attempted anything whatever to save the boat. It was now rushing on with the current, and it was evident that it would remain at an equal distance from either shore until engulfed in the torrent. Then alone did Madame Mornac realise that death awaited them both at the end of this swift journey—horrible, inevitable death—death which one sees draw near, and which no human power can stay. However, instead of taking away her courage, the frightful prospect restored her lost composure. "Andrée," said she, in a voice that no longer trembled, "forgive me."

"Forgive you? You! my second mother," cried the young girl, covering her hands with kisses, "you whom I have led to this, my fatal destiny!"

"My poor child, it is my weakness that has brought this about—it is because you would not desert me when you might have saved yourself that you are now about to perish. Alas! at my age one has no strength or courage left. I ought to have sacrificed my old age unhesitatingly."

"Do you think that I would have consented to remain in the world alone? Do you think I could have seen you die without sharing your fate?" said Andrée, excitedly.

"You had a whole future of happiness before you, while I—"

"Oh, do not speak like that!" cried the young girl, averting her face to conceal her tears.

"I know that Mornac will regret me—your poor godmother, too. How she must have suffered when she saw the boat borne away by the current!"

At this thought Andrée burst into tears

"But no!" exclaimed Madame Mornac, "God will not let us perish. He will send us a protector. He will perform a miracle."

"He performed one at Biville," said Andrée, sadly; and closing her eyes she thought of Jean de Monville, again beholding him as he had stood below the cliffs, pale, with compressed lips and eager eyes, and holding out his hands to snatch her from the furious waves.

Madame Mornac did not speak; it was as though she respected the young girl's silent grief and resignation. She, too, was resigned, but her eyes followed the course of the stream, trying to discern a glimpse of hope.

The scenery had changed. The banks had gradually become lower, and on the right stretched the road from Schaffhausen to the cataract. The Rhine flowed on somewhat less rapidly, and white rocks gleamed amid its blue waters, transparent as crystal. Madame Mornac, who was attentively watching the road, now espied two or three tourists walking quietly along with knapsacks and staffs. She soon saw them stop, raise their hands to heaven, and run off at full speed. She did not even think of calling out to them, so well did she understand the futility of any such effort, but asked herself why they were running away. It was evident that they had seen the boat, and realised the fate which awaited it. Did they hope to save it, or did they wish to spare themselves a frightful sight?

However, suddenly the view widened, and ahead there rose up a bridge, spanning the river. The Zurich railway line boldly crosses the Rhine, and on the left hand passes under a long tunnel. Madame Mornac then remembered that this daring construction, the bridge, rose at but a short distance from the falls. She knew that in a moment more all would be over. Still, a ray of hope was left her. The boat might pass near the piles of the bridge; their hands might be able to clutch hold of some iron ring fastened to the stonework; or a rope might be thrown to them from the top. All this was senseless, but in such cases hope lives to the last moment. Madame Mornac touched the young girl, who was lost in thought, and gently said to her: "Andrée, prepare yourself."

"To die? I am ready," answered Madame de Mathis's goddaughter with touching simplicity.

"No, to try and save us both."

Andrée sadly shook her head, and pointed to the cataract ahead, which was throwing up a mass of foam. A wave now caught the boat and it darted like an arrow towards the middle arch. On the bridge there stood a few frightened spectators. They called out and ran about, but did not attempt to save the boat, and, in point of fact, nothing would now avail, as they knew only too well. The arch was passed, and the boat then immediately entered the rapids above the falls. The water had suddenly grown shallower, sharp rocks jutted above the surface, and violent and repeated shocks shook the frail craft. Andrée looked death in the face, and took in at a glance the frightful spectacle of the waterfall.

The stream is here divided into two sheets of water, separated by a vertical rock which emerges like some great giant from the foaming billows. The spray rising from the abyss throws a halo above the isolated steep, against the base of which the water perpetually dashes, but nature has sown about its sides scant shrubs, which sway in the blast of the cataract, and that day the sun streamed joyously over the rock which the water had polished brightly. Andrée looked for the last time at the blue heavens, the green-tide spring, and then knelt down to pray.

The most miraculous of chances had kept the boat in the exact centre of the stream. Sent at first from one rock to another, it had at last been thrown into the central current, and now sped straight towards the rock which cuts the cataract atwain. The larger mass of water is on the right hand, on which side the water has less force. On the left, however, the Rhine dashes along with astounding violence between the high conical rock and the bank on which wooden staircases have been constructed to enable tourists to view the cataract as closely as possible.

The central rock, even, is accessible on its lower side. That is to say, by embarking below the cataract, it can be reached by careful steering between the two arms of the river which rush forth past either shore. A boat makes the journey all day, and as it is not dangerous, the most timid travellers willingly brave the formidable torrent in this way. The result is, that in fine weather one can almost always see two or three Englishmen with white sunshades perched upon the top of the central rock; but although it may be accessible on this side, no one has ever attempted to approach it from above the stream. The boat, which might by an unhopèd-for chance thus reach the rock, would soon be caught by the current and then overturned in the falls.

While the young girl was praying, bent down near the bows of the boat, Madame Mornac was looking with haggard eyes at the black mass of rock against which the Rhine seemed about to dash them. In such a moment as this the brain acquires almost miraculous power, and the poor woman had time to think that she might still be able to clutch at the rock before being precipitated into the falls. Was it a delusion? She thought that amid the foam about the base she had caught sight of a man who was standing upon the nearest point of the rock. He seemed to be stretching out his arms towards the unfortunate women.

Madame Mornac rose instinctively as if to throw herself towards him, but a frightful shock made her fall backward. The boat had been hurled against the rock, and was half full of water. A few seconds more, and the wave which had raised it would dash it into the depths of the cataract. Andrée closed her eyes, thinking that death had come.

Almost immediately something cold seemed to brush against her cheek; a sharp sound was then heard, and it seemed to her that the boat, instead of capsizing, was slowly advancing, scraping against the rock. This, she thought, would be the last pause before the frail bark was overturned, and she murmured the name of Jean de Monville. At this moment, however, she felt two strong arms about her waist, and became conscious that she was being laid upon solid soil—then all at once she fainted. When she revived, the first person she beheld was Madame Mornac. The good lady was kneeling beside her, rubbing her hands, and uttering confused exclamations. "Where am I?" asked the young girl, in a faint voice.

"In safety, my dear child, in safety! But had it not been for this gentleman, who came to our help just in time, we should both of us at this moment be at the bottom of the Rhine."

Andrée then raised her eyes, and saw a man standing behind Madame Mornac. He was leaning against the rock, with his arms crossed, and, instead of coming forward to help those whom he had just saved, he remained silent and motionless. His attire was as eccentric as his behaviour, for he wore a long cloak, the lowered hood of which covered his face completely.

The boat, hauled out of the water, lay on one side on the slippery base of

the rock. A long rope, having at one end a grappling iron by means of which the bark had been arrested in its course, lay at the feet of the stranger. He had evidently caught and drawn the boat by means of this solid, iron hook, at the very moment when it was about to be capsized, and he had hauled it upon the rock before the current could sweep it into the falls.

Such a feat could never have been effected without the help of Providence, for the moment between life and death had not been long enough for mere humanity to intervene. Madame Mornac, who had seen how the rescue had been effected, since she had been looking at the rock at the very moment of the shock, could not understand how it was that she still really existed. With her impetuous disposition she was not a woman to remain long in uncertainty, and as soon as she saw that Andrée was reviving, she rose quickly and darted towards the stranger. "Ah, sir," said she, hurriedly, "how is it that I have not yet thanked you? You mustn't find fault with me, however. At my age, people easily forget, and I was so much frightened—not so much for myself as for this poor girl."

While she talked on with great rapidity, she seized hold of the stranger's hands. "Come, come!" said she, "I must! I must give you a kiss."

Indeed, she was about to embrace him, but he released his hands, and slipping aside resumed his meditative attitude. Andrée looked on, and her first feeling of terror gave way to other emotions. This man who had given her back her life, and who persisted in concealing his face, awakened strange curiosity in her mind. Her imagination, over-excited by the terrible shocks which she had endured, pictured Jack of the Cliffs in this strange disguise; and this, although she had fully believed him dead, for it was now more than six months since any one had heard aught of the young savage of the Black Rock; however, she was in no condition for sound reasoning, and her heart beat so fast that she could not utter a word.

"Your name, sir, tell me your name, I beg of you," said Madame Mornac, with increasing vehemence.

"There is no use in my giving it," replied the stranger.

"Ah! it isn't he!" murmured the young girl, "I should have recognised his voice."

"No use! What do you mean?" exclaimed the notary's wife. "But I must know, so that I, my husband, my adopted daughter, and her god-mother, and all our relatives, may be able all their lives to show you their gratitude, to love you, and make you happy—"

"I am a foreigner and shall soon leave this place—perhaps to-morrow," stammered the stranger.

"Nonsense! Those are bad reasons for refusing the friendship of two poor women, whom you have just saved from a frightful death! Besides, you will have to take us home to the chalet in which we live at Schaffhausen."

The stranger remained silent, but it was easy to see that Madame Mornac's request did not please him. "Come, sir!" said she, "you cannot mean it. How can you suppose that we are going to let you go off without even knowing to whom we owe our lives? Mornac would never forgive me if I did. He is my husband. I am not like you, and I tell you my name, my husband's name, the name of the best man on the face of the earth—who, by-the-bye, was formerly a notary in Paris—and who will receive you with open arms."

The stranger still hesitated to reply; still he ended by saying, with marked embarrassment: "My name would not afford you any satisfaction,



madame ; but I am greatly touched by the kindness you show me, and I shall always remember it."

Madame Mornac was at a loss to understand the singular obstinacy of her unknown rescuer, but, on the strength of a fresh idea which now entered her head, exclaimed: "We are rich, very rich, and Mornac would cheerfully give half his fortune to the man who had saved him from becoming a widower."

The worthy lady considered that the stranger's attire did not indicate opulence, and thought that he would, perhaps, prefer money to words ; but her remarks produced an effect diametrically opposite to what she had expected.

"I am obliged to leave you, madame," rejoined the stranger, curtly. "The boatmen who brought me are waiting on the other side of the rock. I will tell them that you are here, and they will take you ashore and return for me."

"I did not mean to offend you, sir," now said Madame Mornac, with emotion. "Heaven is my witness that I did not expect to requite you by giving you money. I'm always making the same mistake, it seems."

This strange dialogue had taken place on a narrow platform against which the waves incessantly beat, whilst the rock rose up behind. Andrée had not spoken, but as soon as she recovered her strength, she rose with the intention of joining her entreaties to Madame Mornac's. "Will you refuse me, also?" said she, holding out her hand to her rescuer.

The stranger made a motion as though about to clasp it, but mastered his wish to do so, and drew back near some steps cut in the rock to furnish tourists with an access to the platform. "I will send the boatmen to you, mademoiselle," he said bowing, and thereupon he disappeared behind the rock.

Madame Mornac wished to run after this strange fellow who fled from her thanks, but Andrée detained her. "He will return," said she ; "it is impossible for him to leave us like this."

"Did you ever see such an original being as that?" began the notary's wife, raising her hands to heaven ; "to save people and then desert them? Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"He is perhaps obliged to go off at once. He told us that he was going away from here to-morrow, and—"

"He ! Going away ? Well, he doesn't look much like a tourist in that monk-like garment ! What could he have been doing with that rope and hook ? Whoever he may be, however, we may thank heaven that we have been saved by a miracle, for the second time."

This allusion to the scene at Biville went straight to Andrée's heart, for she had not yet renounced her imaginary belief ; still she dared not to confess to Madame Mornac that she had for an instant hoped that the man in the cloak was Jean de Monville. "Our saviour," resumed the worthy lady, "cannot long hide himself, indeed I must find him again. Schaffhausen isn't such a big place, and even if I have to ransack every inn hereabouts, I'll find him ! Besides, now that I think of it, the boatmen must know who he is, and they will tell me where he lives. Ah ! here they come. My good fellows," she added, to the boatmen, "you are going to take us ashore, are you not ? I am very anxious to set foot on firm land again."

"Certainly we are, madame," said the elder of the two watermen, who had now come forward, cap in hand, "but I can't believe my eyes in see-

ing you here ! I have been forty years in this part of the country, and I never saw anything to equal what has happened to you to-day. The last person who was caught by the current in that way was a young fellow from Dachsen, a village near by. His boat also touched the rock, but the current caught it and whirled it like a feather into the great waterfall."

The other boatman had meanwhile picked up the rope and grappling iron, and having shown it to his comrade they exchanged remarks in German. "It was the foreign gentleman who threw out the rope, was it not?" said the older boatman to the notary's wife.

"What ! didn't he tell you so?" exclaimed Madame Mornac.

"No, indeed ! He was in too great a hurry."

"But he is down there in some boat of yours, is he not?"

"Not at all ! He jumped into a boat which some English people from the Schweizerhof Hotel had left there, and he went off alone, merely calling out to us, 'There are two ladies on the other side ; you must take them home.' We did not know what he meant, as no one ever lands here on this side, as you may suppose ; and we had seen no one about although we had been here for two hours or so."

"Well, let us go ! take us off ! I want to overtake that stranger," said Madame Mornac, eagerly.

"Oh ! he must be ashore by this time."

"But you must know his name ? Who is he ?"

"Well, he engaged our boat last week, and every morning at dawn we bring him here. He stays for two or three hours, more or less, but as soon as he sees a boat coming up with tourists in it, he comes down as fast as he can and we row him ashore."

"What in the world can he do here, perched for entire hours upon this rock ?"

"I can't tell you, indeed, madame. He climbs with his rope and grappling iron to the top of the rock, and jumps about on the outlying crags, and he must be very sure-footed and sharp-sighted not to meet with an accident."

"But it is sheer folly to do such things."

"Well, sometimes he brings a pencil and draws, and people round about say that he is an engineer making plans for the use of the French army in case of war. But that's all rot."

"Is he a Frenchman ?"

"I think so, although he speaks German very well."

This information interested the two ladies so much that they forgot the terrible emotions through which they had just passed.

"The accident must have been seen," resumed the boatman, "for the railway bridge is crowded with people."

And, in fact, a number of curious faces were visible above the parapet, while groups had collected on the road along the right bank. This sight reminded Madame Mornac that her husband might be one of the anxious crowd. The notary had left the chalet early in the morning, and his walk must have taken him in the direction of the falls. It would have been cruel to prolong his suspense ; so she told the boatman that she would listen to the rest of his story while he rowed them home, and then embarked with André. Just as they were seating themselves in the boat, they saw another skiff approach the foot of a mill, near the great waterfall, and a man spring lightly to the ground. "It is he !" said Andrée,

who saw the stranger stride away and disappear behind the trees on the bank.

"Yes, mademoiselle, that's he," replied the old boatman; "he is going home, and we sha'n't see any more of him till to-morrow morning."

"Home!" cried Madame Mornac. "Do you mean to that big hotel up there?"

"No. He is living with a peasant, a full mile from here."

"How strange! One would almost think that there was some mystery connected with his life."

"Oh, it isn't very difficult to guess that," said the boatman taking up his oars.

"What do you mean, my good fellow?"

"Well, as soon as we get out of this whirlpool here, I'll tell you, madame. There's no danger, but one has to be careful hereabouts, you see."

The boat was going ahead, but it rocked so much that it seemed as though it was on the ocean in a high wind. Andrée turned her head, and glancing at the cataract realised the full horror of the fate which she had escaped. The avalanches of water pouring down with a frightful noise gave one the sensation of the most dreadful death.

"There!" said the boatman, when the boat was at some distance from the falls, "we have only to row quietly, now."

"You know, then, why this stranger leads so strange a life?" inquired Madame Mornac.

"He did not tell me, madame, but it is easy to see that he has had some trouble. I even think that he does not care to live, and that he runs into danger so as to lose his life if he can. But it is all very easy to understand."

"Why?" asked Madame Mornac, in surprise.

"Why? Then you did not see his face?"

"No."

"True, he had his hood pulled over it."

"Does he always have it lowered in that way?"

"Generally; but sometimes he forgets, and one day I saw enough of his face to guess what troubles him."

"Tell us what you mean, for Heaven's sake!"

"Well, madame, he doesn't look like a human being."

"What can you possibly mean by that, my good fellow?" asked Madame Mornac, with an air of incredulity.

"Why, as surely as my name is Franz Stapler, and, as I served in Algeria, in the foreign legion, it makes me shudder merely to look at him, and if the young lady saw him she would die of fright."

"Bah! ugliness is no crime: and a man who has saved one's life must always appear handsome."

"Ah, madame, you can't imagine what he looks like! Do you know that folks are beginning to talk about it in the neighbourhood, and have already given him a nickname?"

"What is it?"

"Why, they call him the 'Death's-head,'" replied the boatman, lowering his voice.

## XXII.

ON the evening of this terrible day, the Mornacs sat chatting at their fire-side, in the dining-room of the chalet. In Switzerland the nights are almost always cool, and a fire is not unpleasant in May, so that Madame Mornac had had a large one made of pine logs, to drive away the dampness. Andrée, worn out with fatigue, had retired early, and Madame de Mathis never sat up late. Madame Mornac, therefore, was alone with her husband, and they had so many things to say to one another that they were only too glad of an opportunity for a long talk.

"Really, my dear," said the ex-notary, "I begin to think that luck has set in against us since last year. The death of poor Mathis, your adventure on the beach at Biville, and the danger you were in to-day, all these misfortunes are more than happened to us during thirty previous years of married life."

"That's true, and I can't help suspecting that the hand of that rascal, Jules, is in everything that happens to us."

"What? Monsieur Noridet! He is here, I know. I met him just now as I was coming from the burgomaster's house."

"And you told me nothing about it!" exclaimed Madame Mornac, springing from her chair.

"Dear me! I thought that as we have nothing whatever to do with him, his presence at Schaffhausen would not interest you."

"But don't you realise that it was he who tried to kill Andrée and me this morning?"

"What!" exclaimed M. Mornac, who usually looked favourably upon all men.

"There you go again," retorted his wife, "with your mania for believing that everybody on the face of the earth is good and moral and proper! I tell you that this scamp has come to prowl about the chalet, to spy upon us, and that he profited by a chance, when unobserved, to cut the rope that secured our boat."

"The fact is, that I questioned the boatmen, and they maintain that the rope had been cut short with a knife or an axe; still I cannot believe that there are people wicked enough to commit a crime without the slightest motive."

"Without a motive! Well, Noridet has motive enough, I should say."

"What is it, if you please? Rich as he now is, do you think he cares to appear before a criminal court?"

"But can't you understand that he hates Andrée, who nearly inherited his uncle's fortune in his stead?"

"People may dislike one another and yet be incapable of murdering them."

"That is all very well, but I shall satisfy myself about all this to-morrow; since you are so timid, I shall go to the authorities of Schaffhausen and ask them to have an investigation made."

"My dear, I don't refuse to go with you," said M. Mornac, who did not wish to carry on a matrimonial quarrel; "but it seems to me that we had better first look for the man who saved your lives."

"We can do both; I am quite ready to begin with our rescuer. I hope that we shall be able to thank and reward him as he deserves. We will

take Monsieur Noridet in hand afterwards, and he won't lose anything by waiting."

"I am afraid that we will have a great deal of trouble in finding your strange preserver. The burgomaster confirmed to me everything that was told you about him. It appears that the unfortunate fellow came to this country about the same time as we did, and that he hides himself as though he were a leper, on account of his ugliness."

"It is incredible! But do people even know his name?"

"He is, or calls himself, Pierre Lefort, and he must be well off, as he has already given a thousand francs for the town poor."

Contrary to her usual habit, Madame Mornac fell into a silent reverie. It was easy to see that the mystery of the man with the death's-head absorbed her thoughts to the exclusion of Noridet. "Well!" she cried suddenly, "you may say what you like; but I am not so sorry that the poor fellow is hideous."

"Why, pray?" exclaimed her husband, in surprise.

"Because our dear Andrée has a very lively imagination, and she might have fallen in love with our preserver."

"You must find her a husband, my dear."

"Find her a husband! That's easy to say; but would you believe it, she is still thinking about that young fellow who did us such a service at Biville? Well, she talked to me about him this very morning."

"Yes, yes, poor Jack of the Cliffs! That love affair was certainly a very foolish one; but I never could believe that the poor lad was capable of all the abominations he was charged with."

"I'm very glad, all the same, that we have not heard anything more of him."

"He must have gone to England after his escape. Our farmer, Daugué, wrote to me the other day that they were going to sell his little place at the Black Rock to pay for the legal expenses. But that makes me think of a very strange coincidence."

"What is that?"

"Why, my successor, Franchard, was talking to me of a young man who would be an excellent match for Andrée. He mentioned him to me the day before we went away. He said that he had placed five hundred thousand francs with him in his practice, and that he was very good looking and quite a gentleman. Now, it seems that this phoenix of husbands is named Jean de Monville, the very same name that Jack of the Cliffs claimed as being rightfully his own."

"Well, that only proves that Jean was an impostor. I always thought he was one, for my part." Madame Mornac forgot over readily that she owed her life to the young fellow whom she was thus condemning without appeal, and her husband took his chin between his thumb and forefinger, which, with him, was a decided sign of disapproval.

"I should prefer to hear something about poor Count d'Aleamio who disappeared so mysteriously, and who seemed to take such a deep interest in Andrée. I never knew why, however," said the notary's wife.

"Well," replied her husband, "he must have known her father very intimately indeed, for he would not have given twenty-five thousand francs to a stranger; the count must have been charged to do so by his friend."

"Hum! that story always seemed very queer to me. I greatly approve of Andrée not drawing any of the money."

"The fact is that the deed has never even been taken out of my safe,"

said M. Mornac, "not even for the purpose of receiving payment of the arrears now due, and this irregular state of things must be set right some day, for—"

"Oh! we've time enough for all that! The first thing to be done is to get rid of Monsieur Jules Noridet."

"We cannot prevent him from travelling in Switzerland, can we?" said M. Mornac, quietly.

"What in the world has he come here for, I should like to know! It is the beginning of spring, just the time for the races, and I should have thought he was indispensable in the Bois de Boulogne and at the clubs. Is it natural for this dandy to abandon the drawing-room of Baroness Brossin, to come and promenade up and down at Schaffhausen, where there isn't even a cat to be seen?"

"But, my dear—"

"Be still, Mornac, you drive me crazy! If one only believed you, one would think that everything was charming in life."

"I think that you would do as well to take a little rest," said the ex-notary, timidly, for he foresaw a storm; "you must be dreadfully tired, and it is getting late."

"I am not in the least tired, but I prefer to sleep rather than listen to your stupid remarks."

Having delivered this tart reply, Madame Mornac rose and took up a candle to proceed to her bedroom. Just as she was opening the door near the stairs, the repeated cracking of a whip awakened the echoes of the peaceful chalet, and the noise of carriage wheels abruptly came to a stop outside. At such an hour, and at a season when there are but few tourists in Switzerland, this was quite unusual, and Madame Mornac had the curiosity to look out of the window. It was moonlight, and she saw one of those open flies which stand waiting for tourists at the railway station. A man, alighting, rapidly crossed the little garden in front of the house, and began ringing the bell.

"What does this mean?" now cried Madame Mornac. "Is the place on fire? There you sit like the god Terminus! Can't you go out and ask this pretentious person why he is making such a disturbance at our door?"

"I am going, my dear, I am going!" said the ex-notary, proceeding towards the hall as fast as his dignity would permit. He reached the door, opened it with a certain amount of apprehension, and found himself in the presence of a tall man wearing a travelling cloak. "What do you desire, sir?" he asked.

"Andrée, Mademoiselle Andrée Salazie. Is she alive?"

"Of course she is," replied M. Mornac in amazement.

"Ah! I am in time then!" muttered the stranger. And without another word to the ex-notary he ran back to his conveyance. "To the Schweizerhof," he said to the coachman. And the vehicle darted away with a rapidity that would have put all the cabs in Paris to shame.

The foreign name mentioned by the stranger was that of a vast hotel built on the hill, above the falls, at a short distance from the railway line, and a full half hour's drive from the chalet where the Mornac family were staying. However anxious the traveller might be to reach his destination, he had abundant time to talk to the driver, and the latter spared him the trouble of beginning the conversation. He spoke French, and was talkative, like almost all Swiss drivers, who willingly serve as *ciceroni* to strangers wishing to see the local curiosities. "You wanted to inquire

after the ladies who had such a narrow escape this morning, did you not, sir?" said he, politely touching his hat.

"What do you mean?" asked the stranger.

"What! didn't you hear about the boat? There is nothing else talked of all round about, and you may be sure that it will be in the Zurich newspapers to-morrow."

"I have just left the train, and I have had no time to hear anything. What happened?"

The traveller asked this question in a quiet manner, but his pallor showed that he felt deep emotion.

"Well, the boat in which the lady of the chalet and her young miss were seated nearly went over the falls this morning."

"The falls! You must be crazy! They are still alive."

"Oh! that was through a miracle, and since the Rhine has flowed past Schaffhausen it is the first time that any human being ever reached the middle rock going down stream."

"What! that high rock which divides the cataract in two! Was it there—" This time the stranger's voice trembled so much that he could not finish.

"Well, sir, I must tell you that they were assisted; for, you see, if no one had happened to be there to throw them a rope just at the right moment, the current would have carried them either to the right or the left, and then, farewell!"

"What is the—the name of the man who saved them?" gasped the traveller.

"I cannot tell you, sir, for I don't know it, although people talk about him a great deal, but he lives on the bank of the river below the Schweizerhof, with Fritz, the salmon-fisher, unless, indeed—"

At this moment the driver seemed to hesitate.

"Why don't you continue?" asked the stranger.

"Unless Fritz turned him out this evening, for they say, you see, that he has the evil eye—that is to say, he brings ill-luck upon everybody he sees; and since the accident this morning—"

"But that is absurd," interrupted the stranger, "for, without him—"

"Well, you see, sir, it is a superstition with the people here in the country, and as the poor fellow has a face which—"

"Can you take me to see him now, this evening?" again interrupted the traveller.

"Certainly, sir; my horses are fresh, and there is a road leading straight to Fritz's place; but I thought that you were going to the hotel?"

"So I am, and you must wait for me. I will engage your conveyance for the whole evening on conditions that you won't tell the people at the Schweizerhof a single word about our going to this place."

"Oh! I'll tell them that you are going to look at the moonlight effect at the falls. The English always do that."

There was a somewhat long spell of silence. The stranger seemed absorbed in thought, and the driver whipped his horses to urge them up the hill to the hotel. There were lights in several of the windows of this colossal structure, which sometimes sheltered hundreds of tourists.

"How did this terrible accident happen?" suddenly asked the strange traveller. "Did the ladies venture out alone upon the Rhine?"

"No, sir, they were quietly seated in the boat, which was moored at the end of the garden of their chalet, when suddenly the rope snapped."

"It seems strange that the rope should have snapped just when they were seated in the boat."

"Well, some folks say in Schaffhausen that it was cut, but I cannot believe that anyone would do anything so abominable as that."

"There was only one man in the world capable of it," muttered the stranger, and he added aloud: "Whip up your horses; I want to get to the hotel."

The driver did not need to be told twice. The appearance, language, and manners of the stranger had inspired him with the highest opinion of his generosity, and the prospective of a whole evening's liberal pay stimulated his energy. They soon reached the hotel by a bye-road turning to the left, and the vehicle drove at full trot into the spacious courtyard of the establishment.

"Here are twenty francs for the present," said the stranger to the driver; "you must now go and wait for me at the turn of the road. In an hour's time I shall be there. Above all, not a word to anyone here."

"That is understood, sir."

The horses had scarcely stopped in front of the imposing entrance of the Schweizerhof, when a gigantic doorkeeper, in a blue and gold livery, sounded a gong which brought a swarm of eager attendants to the spot. A house-porter, as obsequious as the doorkeeper, seized hold of the stranger's light baggage, while three young men in black, with white ties, helped him to alight, and a majestic major-domo made ready to take his orders. All these servants looked mild but solemn, and their formal manner would certainly have intimidated any Parisian who was not acquainted with the manners and customs of Swiss hotels; but initiated tourists know that all attentions are charged for in the bill, and that the bearing of these imposing individuals does not prevent them from accepting gratuities when a traveller leaves. The stranger no doubt belonged to the category of experienced tourists, for he negligently threw his cloak over the arm of one of the youths in dress coats, and said to the major-domo:

"I want a bedroom and sitting-room."

"We have what you require on the first floor, sir: three windows looking out upon the falls. Will you be kind enough to follow me?"

The stranger ran lightly up the entrance-steps between a double row of young fellows with white ties, and entered the vestibule. On the right, seated at a mahogany desk, were some clerks making entries with great solemnity in registers of imposing size provided with brass clasps.

"Will you be kind enough to tell me your name?" said the major-domo.

"Count d'Alcamo, Sicilian, from Paris, going to Italy," replied the stranger, in the tone of a man used to Swiss formalities.

The courtesy of the major-domo increased at the announcement of this title—in fact, he became most deferential.

"Be good enough to tell me," now said the aristocratic traveller, "the number of the room occupied by Monsieur Jules Noridet, a French gentleman, who must have arrived here yesterday."

The register-clerk began turning over the leaves of a big book, with true German phlegm, and after a conscientious examination, replied: "We have no one of that name at the Schweizerhof."

The count's face clouded; however, he coldly resumed: "Perhaps Monsieur Noridet may have sent a friend ahead who can tell me where he is. Tell me what French names you have on your list."



"Only two," replied the clerk, "first, Monsieur Gualtier, from Lyons, travelling with his wife. Secondly, Monsieur de Rolleboise—Henri—from his estates near Rouen, going to Geneva."

"The season is just opening," said the major-domo, who was mindful of the dignity of the Schweizerhof, "and tourists are not yet very numerous; but we have several English families, a chamberlain of his Majesty, the Emperor of Russia, two members of the Italian Parliament, three Brazilian gentlemen, and—"

"That will do," interrupted the count, "let me have some supper."

"If you will kindly enter the dining-room, I will have your room got ready, Monsieur le Comte. You will find several persons of distinction at the large table."

"I prefer to sup alone," drily replied M. d'Alcamo.

The major-domo bowed even lower than usual, and, preceding the noble traveller, he ushered him into an extensive and splendidly lighted room. Around a large table of horse-shoe form half-a-dozen gentlemen and as many ladies were drinking tea and eating bread and butter with that air of silent enjoyment which meal-time always brings to the British countenance. Count d'Alcamo glanced at the gathering and saw no face he knew.

"I will set a place for you near the window," resumed the servant; "you can enjoy the sight of the waterfall by moonlight."

But the count did not listen. He had just espied a traveller seated alone at one end of the room at a round table. This person had his back to M. d'Alcamo, and seemed absorbed in emptying a bottle of Rhine wine. The count slowly crossed the room and approached him so softly that he did not even turn round. "Good evening, Monsieur Noridet," said Andrée's protector, laying his hand upon the shoulder of this late diner.

Noridet—for it was he—had never been of a very patient disposition, and since he had reached Switzerland, he was in a frame of mind which made him lose his temper at the least provocation. Feeling a hand laid on his shoulder, his first impulse was to rise and chastise the insolent offender. Perhaps, also, like all whose conscience is not clear, the thought that it might be the hand of the law arose in his mind. It is certain, at all events, that he roughly repulsed the Count d'Alcamo before even catching sight of his face, and indeed he was about to add violence to rudeness, when he recognised his dreaded persecutor. Fortunately, however, the English people at the large table were so busy with their tea that they paid no attention to what was going on. Noridet had turned frightfully pale, and had grasped the back of his chair to keep himself from falling. "I regret appearing before you so abruptly," now said Count d'Alcamo, with the utmost politeness, "but I so little expected the pleasure of meeting you here that I could not resist the temptation to renew an acquaintance which I so greatly prize."

"My surprise is at least equal to yours," stammered Noridet, confounded by this mode of proceeding.

"It seems to me worthless to make a sight of ourselves here," resumed the count; "and as we must have a long talk, I think we may as well take supper together."

"As you like," replied Noridet, completely cowed.

A butler as solemn as the major-domo now approached with measured steps. "Set my plate in front of this gentleman's," said Count d'Alcamo.

"What wine shall I have the honour of bringing you, Monsieur le

Comte ? ” asked the grave-looking servant, who, like a true German, never failed to give all travellers their title.

“ A bottle of Marcobränner, with some ice.”

Noridet was looking down at his plate and toying mechanically with his knife, while the count, with perfect composure, seated himself on the opposite side of the table.

“ Excuse me, my dear sir,” said M. d’Alcamo, “ for having interrupted your meal. This is the second time that we sup together,” he continued, “ and I am very fortunate in meeting you at this hotel just as I met you at an inn one evening. Do you remember a certain evening at that inn at Chevreuse? It was the day before your uncle’s will was read at the château : you were very uneasy, for you were afraid of being disinherited, and I promised you that on the morrow matters would be arranged to your satisfaction. I did not promise wrongly, for, as the will was unsigned, it proved worthless, and you became the undisputed lord and master of Monsieur de Mathis’s three millions. Yes, I have kept my promises, every one of them, I am proud to say, but you have not kept yours.”

“ I thought that you had forgiven the past,” said Noridet, in a voice which trembled with fear.

“ If you allude to the attempt which you made to murder me, and my steward as well, I will tell you that I have not pardoned them, but that I have forgotten them, because for the time being it suits me to do so. It isn’t about those matters that I wish to speak to you this evening.”

“ What is it, then ? ” asked Noridet, trying to resume his boldness. “ Haven’t I scrupulously kept the agreement which binds me to you ? Did you tell me to do anything more than to frequent Monsieur Brossin’s house and court his daughter ? ”

“ That will suffice. You can come back when I call you,” now said the count to the waiter, who at this moment brought him a tray, on which was set the invariable Swiss supper—trout, crayfish, and venison cutlets. When the butler had respectfully set before M. d’Alcamo the nine-pin-like bottle of Marcobränner, and the customary blue wineglass, the two antagonists found themselves alone.

“ Be kind enough to listen attentively to me,” resumed the count, “ for this is probably the last private conversation which we shall have together.”

Noridet could not restrain a gesture of delight.

“ I am obliged to resume the conversation at the point when we met last November, that is to say, when you were lying on the flagstones at the Black Rock with a sword wound in your breast.”

At this remembrance Noridet turned very pale.

“ It depended upon me, as you know, to let your adversary dispatch you, or even to let you die of exhaustion from loss of blood. Instead of resorting to such extreme measures, however, I protected you, revived you, and had your wound dressed, and gave you a cordial of such good effect that during the night one was able to take you to Dieppe, where after a few days’ rest and nursing, you were cured completely. Before sending you away, I said to you ; ‘ I allow you to live on two conditions. The first is, that you do not attempt to leave France again ; the second, that you will not try to injure any of those whom I protect. You know who they are, and I need not name them to you.’ You swore to do as I required, and I allowed you to depart, ordering you to return to Paris, and await my instructions there.”

"And as I did not receive any for six months," rejoined Noridet, "I thought myself free, except as regarded crossing the frontier. Besides, you can easily see that I am here as a mere tourist, and have no intention of leaving France."

"I know that, as you have not taken your money with you, and you are not a man to go away without being well provided in that respect."

Noridet reddened to the ears. This remark proved that the mysterious personage from whom he had thought himself free for ever, had never, for one instant, ceased keeping a secret watch over his movements.

"What have you to reproach me with, then?" he said, bitterly. "Do you forbid my coming as far as the Rhine? What does it matter to you whether I am at Schaffhausen or at Enghien, since you can ruin me at any time by bringing forward the valid will?"

While he spoke the count looked at him with angry eyes, and the effect of his persistent gaze was such that Noridet, in confusion, stopped short in his desperate attempt at self-justification. M. d'Alcamo then slowly raised his hand, and pointed towards the window.

Below the Schweizerhof the river turned, and the cataract was visible just in front of the dining-room. In the moonlight, there gleamed a broad white bar extending from shore to shore, and the central rock uprose like a dark spectre. Noridet followed the direction of the count's accusing gesture with his eyes, and feared its meaning.

"Thank Heaven, which saved Mademoiselle Andrée Salazie," now said the count, in a low but distinct tone. "Had she perished in that vortex, I swear to you, Monsieur Jules Noridet, that this night you would be in the Schaffhausen prison, and before the end of the summer, I should have had the pleasure of seeing you in Paris on the scaffold, which awaits poisoners and murderers."

"I—do not—know—what you mean," stammered the guilty man, with difficulty.

"What! you don't guess that I know how and by whom the rope was cut?"

"It isn't true! You have no proofs—you cannot have any."

"Perhaps not," said the count, who had again become calm. "However, I may have proofs of the crime at Chevreuse, and these proofs would suffice to send you where you so well deserve to go. I am determined to use them if necessary."

"We are not in France now," said Noridet, who seemed anxious to leave his seat.

"No, but extradition is never refused when monsters like you are in question. Sit still, and let me finish what I have to say."

"I am listening," replied Noridet, hoarsely.

"For six months past you have not done anything which I have not known, or taken a step which I have not had watched. Although you have not received any orders from me, that is merely because the time for action had not yet come; and if you have for an instant escaped those who have been following you, believe me it will not occur again. Besides, the time is not far off when your servitude will come to an end."

"What do you mean?" asked Noridet, panting for breath.

"I mean that before a month has elapsed, I shall have obtained from you all that I wish; and then, I not only won't prevent you from leaving France, but I shall give you orders to leave it, and I shall prevent you from ever returning. It is on these conditions that I will once more consent to spare your life."

"Will you give me back the will and the proofs?"

"You shall keep your fortune, and I will promise not to denounce you as long as you remain abroad."

Noridet bowed his head, biting his lips till the blood came, but he realised only too well that he could not refuse to obey, and besides, he relied upon chance to free him from Alcamo's power. "What must I do?" he asked.

"In the first place you must start for Paris to-morrow morning."

"I will do so."

"You will resume your usual mode of life while there, and when you chance to meet me at Monsieur Brossin's house—"

"But he believes you dead," interrupted Noridet, unthinkingly.

"I will undertake to explain my accident and absence, and you must take care not to say anything contradictory. In addition, you must well come any one whom I may choose to introduce to Madame Brossin."

"Very well. Is that all?"

"You can scarcely suppose so. The rest is this: No matter when I bid you do so, you must ask for the hand of Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin in marriage."

"I will do that. What then?"

"I shall also have occasion to summon you before a magistrate."

On hearing this, Noridet started.

"Oh, don't be alarmed," added the count. "You will simply be called upon to testify in a matter which does not concern you personally."

"Very well. What then?"

"After that, as I have just told you, you can take your uncle's millions to America. But remember this: at the first attempt which you make against Mademoiselle Andrée, or those about her, I shall hand you over to justice.—This Marcobrunner is excellent," added Count d'Alcamo, in a louder voice, as he ended, and saw the major-domo gravely advancing to tell him that his room was ready.

He now rose, made a friendly gesture which averted the necessity of his offering his hand to his companion, and said in a careless tone: "My dear sir, as you are returning to Paris to-morrow by the first train, I won't prevent you from retiring early. As I have only just arrived I prefer to smoke a cigar in the garden, and look at the effect of the moonlight on the waterfall."

This remark was partly intended to explain the situation to the butler, but it contained an order which Noridet easily understood. He bowed politely and left the table to return to his room where he had to make his preparations for departure. Once more the scoundrel felt that he was under the sway of a will superior to his own, and he saw the impossibility of carrying on so unequal a struggle. The prospect of reaching the term of his bondage somewhat consoled him, and he not unwillingly prepared to return to Paris. "This man cannot live forever," he said to himself as he went up the staircase of the Schweizerhof. "After his death I can return to France even if he obliges me to leave it, and I shall, perhaps, only have to make a short stay in America."

While the murderer was thus reasoning, Count d'Alcamo left the dining-room, and took a few turns up and down the terrace where several romantic Englishwomen were already seated. The absorption of an unlimited number of cups of tea had undoubtedly awakened their enthusiasm, for, while contemplating the Rhine, lighted up by the silvery rays of the moon, they heaved sighs enough to turn a windmill. The count, who was not given to

reverie, at last proceeded to the lower part of the garden where he was sure of meeting no one, as admiration in solitude is not to the taste of sentimental lady-tourists from Great Britain. He soon found a gate conducting out of the grounds and started down a steep road, to the Schaffhausen highway. Here he espied his conveyance waiting for him, and he had some trouble in awakening the driver who was snoring on his box.

"I didn't think that you would come at all, sir," said the fellow, rubbing his eyes. "Do you still wish to go to Fritz's cot?"

"Of course I do," said Count d'Alcamo, getting into the vehicle, "but it is unnecessary to let the people at the hotel see us."

"There is a road which winds round at some distance from the Schweizerhof, but I am afraid that everybody in the cot will be asleep."

"We will wake them up then; I must, without fail, see the man whom we spoke about, this very night."

"The place hasn't a very good name."

"Are you afraid?" asked the count, abruptly.

"No, sir," replied the driver, whipping up his horses. "For although a great many stories have been told about old Fritz, I don't believe a single word of them, and as for the evil eye which his lodger is accused of having, you know that when a man has served in the militia for five years, he doesn't credit such nonsense."

"Let us go on then," said Alcamo quietly; "if you manage properly, I will double your pay."

The vehicle now rolled along on the Basle road, and the well-rested horses trotted briskly enough to show that the trip would not take up much time. Indeed after twenty minutes driving along the hilly but well kept road, the conveyance turned down a sloping byway.

"I am obliged to go slowly here, sir," said the driver, "for the descent is very difficult, and there are a great many stones."

"All right, we have time enough."

"I don't know whether I can get as far as the door of Fritz's place; his shanty is perched among the rocks near the water, and there is the very deuce of a road below."

"Never mind; stop when the horses have gone as far as they can manage and I will walk the rest of the way."

"That will be all the better, for if the stranger should hear the sound of our wheels he might shut himself up, and refuse to open the door."

"Why should he do that?"

"Oh, because he is like some 'wild man o' the woods.' He always thinks that people go to see him out of curiosity, and as he is well off—so it appears—he doesn't care to show himself to amuse people. Only lately, some Russians who had put up at the Rheinfall Hotel, on the other side of the river, heard that the stranger with the death's-head was walking about under the willow trees, so they crossed the river expressly to see him. But as soon as he saw them coming, he perched himself in the loft of the hut, and sent them word by Fritz that if they persisted in advancing he should fire at them."

"That's strange," muttered Alcamo.

The information given him concerning the singular foreigner disturbed him greatly, and he asked himself by what series of events this unfortunate fellow so afflicted by nature had found himself at hand, at the very moment when needed, to rescue André. However, after half-an-hour's difficult driving, the coachman pulled up his horses on a little platform be-

low some gigantic walnut-trees, the branches of which stretched out over the road.

"It is impossible to go any further, sir," he said.

"All right. You must show me the way, that's all," replied the count, leaping lightly to the ground.

"The shanty is just below the spot where we now are. You must go that way, on the right. The path turns two or three times, but it ends in front of Fritz's door, so you cannot make a mistake."

"Good! Remain here till I return."

"Certainly, sir. I sha'n't stir, and if you need me, sir, you only have to call me. My horses are too tired to run away and besides I am going to give them some oats."

"I hope that I shall not need you," replied Alcamo, who did not imagine that he was running into any danger.

"Ah, you are in luck," rejoined the driver: "the stranger isn't in bed yet. I see a light in the shanty."

The count stooped down, holding on to the trunk of a tree, and fifty feet below him he saw a faint glimmer of light. "I shall be back in an hour's time," he called out, and then walked briskly away.

The driver's warnings to be careful were lost amid the rustling of the leaves in the wind, and Alcamo soon found himself alone on an abrupt slope, darkened by huge overhanging rocks. He helped himself along to the best of his ability by clutching at the bushes on the other side of the road, and proceeded cautiously, trying to avoid alarming the inmate of the hut. Pebbles rolled away every moment as his feet touched them, and made the descent difficult. At last, however, he reached the foot of the slope, and saw that the Rhine was running along some twenty feet away. The salmon fisher had built his hut on a narrow strip of land which lay between the rocks and the river. The mysterious stranger who seemed to fly from everyone could not have found a more retired spot. The hut was a shapeless mass of planks and trunks, roughly hewn and surmounted by a pointed roof. This primitive dwelling had two floors, however, and a light was shining from the only window of the lower one.

Alcamo stealthily approached and looked in at the window. He saw a mattress in one corner, two or three low stools, and a deal table. The place seemed little suited to a wealthy tenant. By the light of a rustic lamp, a man was reading attentively. He was leaning upon his elbows, and his hands supported his head which was covered by the hood of his cloak; moreover, he sat with his back to the window, so that, even if the hood had not been raised, the count could not have seen his features. This was unmistakably the stranger, however, for he had neither the dress nor the general appearance of the people of the neighbourhood, and the fact that he covered his face in this manner, sufficiently proved that he was determined to preserve a strict *incognito*.

Alcamo was gazing, beyond a doubt, at Andrée's mysterious rescuer, and it depended upon him to penetrate the mystery with which this strange person surrounded himself. He thought, at first, of remaining motionless at his post and waiting till the man with the death's head turned round. He was curious to see whether the driver had not exaggerated the ugliness with which the unfortunate fellow was afflicted. However, two or three minutes elapsed without his making any motion. The count then concluded that his secret observation was too much like that of a spy, and he advanced towards the door. The latch yielded to the pressure of his fingers, the door

opened easily, and as he stepped lightly, he had advanced some little way into the room before the stranger was aware of his presence. The brushing of Alcamo's cloak against some fishing-tackle attracted the reader's attention, however, and he started up. The count had so manoeuvred that they were in front of one another, and he introduced himself with a phrase which he had already prepared. "Fear nothing, sir," he said, softly, "I am a friend who has come to see and thank you."

Hearing a human voice in the midst of his solitude, the stranger bounded as frightened as Robinson Crusoe, when he espied Friday's footprints on the sand of his island. He stood erect with his back to the wall, and his arms extended as though to repulse the stranger who had dared to disturb him; however, the movement which he had made in rising, had made his hood fall back, and his face was now clearly visible in the lamplight.

Alcamo recoiled with surprise, almost with terror. Never had his imagination called up so hideous a sight.

The stranger had no eyebrows, and his two sunken lifeless eyes seemed like two black holes above his projecting cheek bones. His nose was shapeless, and his lips, drawn back by a horrible contraction, displayed a double row of white teeth. His skin was of the colour of parchment, and his denuded forehead had the earthy hue of skulls polished by time, which are found in ossuaries. The resemblance to a death's-head was striking, but the most frightful characteristic of this funereal mask was its immobility. The unhappy fellow's face was powerless to construe the impressions of his mind. The wrinkles furrowing his emaciated cheeks, seemed as though cut in the marble of a tombstone, and his mouth displayed that eternal grin of death so often seen in skulls. It seemed as though his features had turned to stone in the convulsions of dying agony, and that they would never again express joy, grief, or, indeed, any of the sensations of a living creature. The count's amazement was such that he could not add a word to the brief sentence which he had articulated before seeing the stranger's face. The latter soon discovered that he had disclosed his lineaments to view. He raised his hood and lowered his head so as to hide himself from Alcamo, who, he thought, came as an enemy. "What do you desire?" he asked in a husky voice.

"I have just told you," said Alcamo, "I came to thank you."

"I don't need any one's thanks, and I have a right to complain of your coming in here without my permission."

"Excuse me for having compelled you to receive me. My heart was overflowing with gratitude, and I knew that to express it I should be obliged to take you by surprise."

These words were spoken with so much simplicity and cordiality that the lonely tenant of the hut seemed to relent a little. "Excuse me, sir," said he, sadly; "but those who are unhappy are always disposed to believe that persons merely call on them to see and rejoice in their wretchedness, and above all things, I wish to prevent people from gazing on the sad sight which you have just beheld."

"I can understand that, as regards indifferent people, but I am a friend."

"A friend!" repeated the stranger, bitterly.

"Yes, this morning you snatched from a frightful death a person who is dearer to me than my own life. However, you do not believe me when I say that I am your friend."

"Do you know that young girl?" cried the stranger. Then, as though

he feared that he had allowed it to be seen that he took too great an interest in Andrée, he added, lowering his voice: "I thank God who inspired me with the thought of visiting that rock, since I was able to save two lives."

"That young girl," said Alcamo, "is all that binds me to life, for I also have suffered; I also am unhappy."

The stranger started, and the count thought that he looked at him attentively, however, he did not reply.

"My mission in this world," continued Alcamo, "is to watch over her, protect her, and defend her."

"Has she any enemies, then?" asked the tenant of the hut, almost trembling.

"One only, a monster; the man who this very morning attempted to kill her by cutting the rope that secured the boat."

"I was told that had been done, but I refused to believe it."

"It is true, however."

"Tell me that scoundrel's name!" exclaimed the stranger.

The count hesitated for an instant. He felt himself drawn towards this unfortunate man by an indefinable impulse, and he almost yielded to the idea of associating him with his vengeance. However, he again became sufficiently master of himself to say: "The secret is not mine."

"Well, sir," said the stranger, after a somewhat lengthy pause, "I am alone, I am poor, and you have just seen that I am a spectacle of horror; but if I thought that the sacrifice of my very life could be of use to her whom—whom you love, I should be ready to make it."

"Give me your hand," said Alcamo, holding out his own.

"I have taken a vow never to touch the hand of any living person," replied the stranger in a low voice.

The count now brought forward a stool and seated himself at the table. "You will not, at least, refuse to confide in me," he said, gently. "When a man suffers he needs to open his heart to a friend, and I hope that you will allow me to be yours."

The book which the stranger had been reading had remained open, and Alcamo saw that it was the "Imitation of Jesus Christ."

"The consolations which I derive from this work suffice me," said the so-called Pierre Lefort, pointing to the pages on which he had been reflecting.

"Listen to me, sir," rejoined Alcamo gravely. "Heaven is my witness that I do not wish, against your will, to penetrate the mystery in which you try to shroud yourself. But you have just told me that you would die for Andrée if need were, and on her behalf I accept the devotion you offer. In order that we may watch over her together, I must know—"

"Who I am?" interrupted the recluse, seating himself in front of Alcamo, and after a brief pause, he added, slowly: "*I have no existence. I am dead.*"

Alcamo at first thought that this was some ghastly kind of jest. He would even have thought it in somewhat bad taste had not the stranger's misfortune pleaded an excuse. "I can understand that you should be dead to the world," said he, gently. "I, myself, have often thought of seeking utter solitude, and it is not for my own sake that I care to live."

"We do not understand each other," resumed the unknown. "I should long ago have shut myself up in the monastery of La Trappe or at the Grande Chartreuse, if I had not thought that I might be useful to my fellow creatures by remaining master of my own will and actions."



"After what occurred this morning you cannot regret your determination."

"No, indeed; and I have firmly resolved to devote the remainder of my sad life to succouring the unfortunate and protecting the weak; but my existence—I have already told you so—does not belong to me; I am usurping life, stealing it, if you prefer the term, for I am dead—dead indeed!"

"Explain yourself more clearly, pray," said the count, who began to fear that he was talking to a mere madman.

"Well, sir," continued the recluse, "I do not know you, and I ought not to thrust my confidence upon you, but I feel myself drawn towards you by a feeling which I cannot define. Will you allow me to tell you my story? You will be the first person to whom I have told it."

"Must I repeat that you are speaking to a friend?" exclaimed Alcamo, in a tone so full of frankness that the stranger's last scruples departed.

"The people round about here," said he, "must have told you the name which I gave them."

"Pierre Lefort. I shall never forget it."

"It is not mine, however—the one I once bore will never again be known on earth, until it appears upon a tombstone."

"A tombstone!"

"Listen, and I will tell you how in one single day a man may lose all that is precious on earth. A year ago—less than a year—I was young, I loved, and I was loved, and by chance I had been born noble and rich. Life opened before me gay and brilliant, and I did not even foresee the possibility of a misfortune."

"It seems to me as though I were listening to the story of my own past," murmured the count.

"A day came, however, when, seized with sudden, violent, inexplicable illness, I felt all the sources of life exhausted within me. To tell you what I suffered during those terrible hours, while my strong frame struggled against a burning fever, and struggled in vain, would be impossible. I wished to drive death away, implacable death, which I saw drawing near me, and I fell back exhausted upon my bed of pain."

"Was there no one near to help you?"

"I was alone, far from my own part of the country, far from my relatives, and around my bed there were merely indifferent persons and servants. I tried to write, but my body writhed in convulsions beyond belief, and my hand lacked the strength to hold a pen. I wished to speak, but my contracted mouth would not utter intelligible words. This agony lasted for three long days and nights, and I at last felt the passing relief which precedes the final moment. It seemed to me that my soul gradually freed itself from its earthly bonds, and the things of this world appeared to me through a mist like the dim vista of a dream. Then my brain became numbed, my heart ceased beating, and I felt as though I were sinking into eternal sleep."

"But the doctors near you could not have been mistaken; apparent death never presents the signs of actual death, and they must—"

"The illness that had fallen upon me was like no other," said the man who called himself Pierre Lefort. "It caused a complete disorganization of the system, and you have seen that although I still exist I have virtually survived myself."

This allusion to his ugliness made Alcamo shudder.

"How long the lethargy lasted into which I fell I have never known, for from that moment all knowledge of external things passed from me. I died as it were, yes, died. I was surrounded by strangers, and no one had any interest in watching beside my disfigured remains. I have since learned that the people who were there confined themselves to the legal formalities, just letting my family, who were in the country, know that I was dead."

"And it is to a relative that you owe—"

"When I revived," interrupted the stranger, "I did not at first understand all the horror of my situation. The first sensation I experienced was a violent pain in the chest. It seemed to me as though an enormous weight oppressed my lungs, as if I had a band of fire round my throat. At the same time the veins in my forehead beat violently, and the blood rushed to my temples. I tried to raise my hand, but invincible paralysis held me in thrall. I then thought of lethargy for the first time, but I imagined that I was still upon the bed at the hotel where I had lain in agony for sixty hours. My eyes opened, but I only saw darkness. For an instant I thought that I had become blind."

"This is frightful," murmured the count.

"At last a convulsive start bent my whole body, and my head, which I had raised, struck against a cold, hard substance. Then, then only, I guessed the horrid truth; I was shut up in a coffin."

The emotion awakened by this terrible recollection impeded Pierre Lefort's power of speech; he was obliged to pause. The count looked at him without daring to give vent to any commonplace consolation, and it was strange to see these two men, unknown to each other, seated in this wretched hut and talking of things which seemed to belong to another world, by the light of the fisherman's lamp.

"Where was I?" said Lefort. "In what sepulchre had my coffin been placed? This it was impossible for me to guess. However, I felt sure that I was not in the depths of a grave, for the weight of the earth would inevitably have stifled me. It even seemed to me that in stirring I had felt the coffin shake. I made a fresh attempt, and this time I realized beyond a doubt that I had caused the horrible box in which I was inclosed to move again. Then I summoned my energy, and I recovered sufficient clearness of thought to reason as to my situation. If the bier was thus stirred by the slightest motion, I might suppose that it was not placed in some narrow vault. This discovery renewed my courage, and I soon succeeded in moving my arms, which had so far been close to my sides. I cannot tell you how much time and strength it required for me to disengage them from the grave-clothes which held them down. One must have felt the repulsive contact of a stiff and icy shroud to be able to imagine this frightful struggle for freedom."

Pierre Lefort paused once more to take breath, as though he still felt oppressed by the heavy atmosphere of his tomb. The noise of the Rhine beating against the foundations of the hut was heard for a moment and then he spoke again: "At last my hands became free, and by feeling the boards against which I lay, I found that the top of the coffin scarcely held to the sides. It had been but half-nailed down; merely some long nails at the corners held it to the body of the bier. There was a space large enough to admit external air, and I owed my life to this precaution, which had been doubtless taken merely because there had been an intention of making some change in the place of my interment. I held on with the energy of despair

to the unexpected chance that was thus offered me, and I stiffened myself in such a way as to bring my arms and knees against the lid. The effort was less painful than I had thought it would be, and at last the lid came off."

"You were saved?" exclaimed Alcamo.

"I had emerged from the coffin, but I was not free. Dense obscurity surrounded me, and damp cold air beat against my face. I rose; I freed myself from my shroud and tried to walk, but I felt my limbs give way beneath me, and at the first step I fell heavily. I extended my arms to raise myself up and my hands grasped a skull. I had fallen upon a heap of bones. I cannot describe the horror of this discovery. I knew that I counted no more among the living, and yet the contact with the dead filled me with indescribable repugnance. These bones which I should have looked at and handled without the least emotion had I belonged to life, I feared—I absolutely feared them, and yet I swear to you that I had never feared danger in life."

"I can realise that," murmured Alcamo, who thought of the daring feat of the morning.

"When once the first fright had passed away," resumed Pierre Lefort, "I tried to account for the accident which had befallen me, and feeling the ground with my fingers, I found that it was strewn with human remains. It was evident that my coffin had been placed in some ossuary, and I was shut up, probably forever, in the depths of a subterranean sepulchre. But what sepulchre could it be? I was sufficiently well acquainted with the funeral customs in Paris, and my situation seemed unaccountable. In the cemeteries of the capital where I had died there are temporary vaults where bodies are placed while waiting for removal elsewhere, and it might be that my family had given orders for placing my body in some such place till they sent further instructions. However, I had been charged, the very summer before, with the sad duty of attending to the removal of the remains of one of my friends, and I knew that the usual place of deposit was too small and too carefully kept for piles of bones to be left lying about there. This funereal accumulation is only met with in the catacombs, and it seemed to me altogether unlikely that my body had been hidden in the depths of one of those places."

"You had enough freedom of mind to reason like that!" exclaimed Alcamo, in astonishment.

"Yes," said Pierre Lefort. "Either my peril lent me unusual energy, or the weakening of my physical powers had increased my intellectual faculties; at all events, my brain had suddenly acquired extraordinary activity. My ideas followed one upon another with incredible rapidity, and I took in both the past and present with a kind of double vision. I had already experienced somewhat similar sensations in the delirium of my fever, and it seems to me that the same must be the case with a person's thoughts when in a somnambulistic state."

"I have had occasion to observe this nervous effect among shipwrecked people, who had been suffering from hunger for a long time," said Alcamo.

"Well, it did not take me a moment to discover that I was in a strange situation, differing from that usual with people about to be interred. However, I lived, and far from despairing of again seeing the light of day, I resolved to make every effort to escape from my strange prison. I began by walking around it. I had risen, badly bruised by my fall, and I avoided tripping again by carefully fumbling as I moved. The ground on which I

stood was sodden earth, and I felt cold dampness beneath my feet. This was a fresh proof that I had not been laid in one of the vaults in Paris, which are paved with stone and enclosed with brick work. I extended my arms and went along feeling the walls, which seemed to me full of sharp projecting stones. The vault overhead, which I easily touched by raising my hands above my head, was of the same description. So I seemingly found myself in an ordinary cellar, which was not even kept in order for the purpose for which it was used. I soon discovered that my coffin was the only one in the vault, and I could not understand how this hole full of bones had been chosen for my last abode. I had not left any near relation behind me, but, however indifferent and greedy my heirs might be, I did not believe them capable of such cynical forgetfulness of all the rules of propriety. I was, therefore, reduced to suppose that my mortal remains had been left to the care of some dependent anxious to get rid of them, and yet, even this conjecture ill accorded with Parisian customs, which regulate and register everything, even death itself."

"You must have been taken to your native place?"

"This idea certainly occurred to me, but in that case, again, such monstrous negligence seemed impossible. My family had owned in the provinces, from time immemorial, a chapel in which my ancestors had been buried, and where a resting place had been kept for me beside my father. How could I suppose that, in a place where every one had always regarded those bearing my name with love and respect, that my heirs had dared to thrust my coffin into a common vault, instead of consigning it to the predetermined spot?"

"That is true. Human respect would have prevented them from acting like that," said the count.

"I once more lapsed into a labyrinth of endless conjecture. My prison must have an exit, and by dint of roaming about in all directions, I ended by discovering three stone steps above which there was a high and narrow door. I soon inspected the hinges, which seemed to me to be firmly set in the wall, and the lock, which was rough with rust. This rapid examination showed me that the barrier which separated me from life was seldom opened; and yet the people who had placed my body in the vault might visit it again. I did not ask myself why, but it seemed to me impossible that even a corpse could be left like this. I had left some devoted friends on earth, a woman I had dearly loved, and I did not yet believe in the profound forgetfulness shown for the dead."

"Friends! relatives!" exclaimed D'Alcamo, in a hoarse voice. "Those who are unfortunate need not die to be forgotten."

"I know that now," sadly resumed Pierre Lefort, "but I had just left people who, so I believed, felt eternal affection for me, and my heart revolted at the idea of this abandonment. I thought that over my head, above the frozen soil, there were loved ones sending their thoughts to me, and I stretched out my arms towards them without seeing them."

"But didn't you call out and hammer at the door?"

"Well, yes; a feverish rage followed upon my state of exaltation. I bruised my hands by knocking on the door which shut me in. I broke my nails and made them bleed in trying to draw out the hinges deeply buried in the massive stone. But I had to deal with an oaken door that would even have defied blows from a club, and I did not succeed in shaking it. Then I began raising shouts of despair. But the vault stifled them without an echo resounding, and I realised the earth must absorb all sobs and

cries. My dungeon was a tomb, and this time I was indeed buried alive, and as I believed, forever."

"I have known all kinds of suffering," said the count, "but I have never dreamed of anything so atrocious."

"My strength was soon exhausted," continued the recluse, "and I relapsed into utter prostration. I had wandered, at first, haphazard, about the vault, and finding the coffin in which I had lain, I was tempted to stretch myself in it once more, to die. I lacked the courage to do so, however, and sank down in a corner of the vault, near the door. I remained there, motionless, and mute, with my head leaning against the lower step, and I was reduced to a strange condition, being especially tormented by the darkness. The dense obscurity seemed to weigh with enormous force upon my heavy eyelids. I saw sparks flash before me; but this was an hallucination. All my thoughts were concentrated in a mad desire to see. Yes, of all things else, I longed to see. It seemed to me that if a ray of light could penetrate the vault I should be saved."

"That was the delirium of fever," said Alcamo, in a low tone.

"I remained for a long time in this condition; long hours, perhaps days, and I ended by finally losing all consciousness of my situation. At last, however, a singular noise caught my ear. I was lying at the foot of the steps, and amid my hallucination I discerned footsteps resounding outside the vault. Some one was coming towards the door, and I presently heard a sharper sound, that of a bunch of keys being shaken. This noise presaged deliverance, and I suddenly recovered all the strength I had lost. I rose up, and I remember that I had the presence of mind to place myself in a corner out of sight of the person who was about to enter."

"It might, indeed, have been an enemy," murmured the count.

"In my situation everything was to be feared; but what I dreaded above all things was frightening the person who was about to enter the vault. The sudden apparition of a being covered with the fragments of a shroud, would inspire him with such horror and alarm, that he might fly and close the door. I had not life enough left me to wait for the coming of some one who might not be a coward, and I wished at all hazards to profit by the un hoped-for chance which was now offered me. I waited, trembling with emotion rather than with the cold, and I had the inexpressible joy of hearing the key being placed in the lock, and then turn. The door opened slowly, and I saw a man appear with a lantern in his hand. So far as I could judge by the doubtful light he was dressed like a peasant. A wide-brimmed hat was pulled down over his face and hid his features from me.

"I did not move, as I wished first of all to ascertain for what purpose he had come to the vault. The corner where I had hidden myself was wrapped in shade, and the new comer could not see me. He appeared, besides, to be lost in deep thought, for he remained, with his head bent, upon the lower step. It seemed as though this dwelling of the dead filled him with awe and dread, and that he hesitated to advance. At last, however, he made up his mind, and I saw him draw out the key which had remained in the lock, and use it to turbed in whatever he intended doing, he proceeded towards the end of the vault where my coffin had been placed. What motive impelled him to visit my tomb? I could not tell. I knew not, but I was now sure that he could neither abscond nor cut off my retreat. The moment had come for

showing myself, but I had to be extremely careful so as not to terrify this visitor. I thought that my voice would alarm him less than my ghost-like appearance, and so I announced my presence by articulating a few words imploring his pity; but although I spoke softly my words produced an overwhelming effect upon him. He shuddered, and turned round, and then as soon as he saw me he dropped his lantern, and sunk down beside my empty coffin."

"And then you ran to the door to open it?"

"No, despite my desire to breathe once more the air of life, I could not forsake the poor fellow to whom I was indebted for deliverance. I ran to him, and helped him to rise up. Fortunately, the lantern had not gone out, and sustained by the fictitious strength which had come upon me with the hope of liberty, I soon succeeded in raising him to a sitting posture. He had fainted. I placed him with his back to the wall, and tried to revive him. His hat had rolled off in his fall, and his long white hair had fallen over his face in such a way as to hide it. I put it back, and I have since often thought that if any one had thus beheld us, he would have seen a strange sight—a man in a swoon being brought back to consciousness by a man who had been buried alive. However, I turned the light of the lantern full upon the old man's pale face, and in my turn I uttered a cry of surprise."

"Did you know him?"

"Heaven orders all things well," replied Pierre Lefort. "My deliverer was the oldest servant of my family, an old keeper with whom I had played in my childhood, and who, in the early days of my youth, had taught me how to ride and how to fire a gun."

"But by what miracle had he come to deliver you?" asked Alcamo, in amazement.

"The matter was very simple, as you will realise. Alain—such was his name—revived at the expiration of a few moments. He was brave and robust, and only such an apparition as I had seemed to be, could have made him faint. I had, however, a great deal of trouble in convincing him that I was really alive, and that it was not his young master's ghost that stood before his eyes. Still, when he had felt me, pressed me in his arms, and kissed my forehead, bursting into tears as he did so, he threw himself upon his knees to thank providence for having permitted my resurrection. It was then my turn to question him, and this is what I learned: My only relatives were two distant cousins, who inhabited the province where I was born. The news of my death reached them by telegraph, and one of them, the younger, who had always shown me a great deal of affection, started at once for Paris. He wished that my body should be placed in the family sepulchre, and he decided to bring it back to my native place. Our province is one of those where old customs are still kept up, and for three leagues around every peasant thought it his duty to attend the funeral of the last heir to a name which had always been treated with respect. My coffin had arrived in the evening, and the mournful ceremony was to take place on the following day."

"I can guess the rest," exclaimed the count, "you had been laid—"

"In the crypt of the old church of our parish. My cousins had deposited my coffin there for the time being. It was like the last halt on my last journey, the resting-place where I must needs lie for one night while awaiting eternal rest beside my father."

"But you surely resumed your place in the world, and took your name again?" said Alcamo, with indescribable emotion.

"Alain had come to the vault to pray for the last time beside my coffin," resumed Pierre Lefort, quietly. "The priest had lent him the keys of the church and crypt, and the old servant had waited till night to fulfil his pious duty. He now took off his cloak to hide my nakedness, and, leaning upon his arm, I left the crypt. The hour was somewhat late, and we passed through the village without meeting any one. A quarter of an hour after my deliverance I was lying in Alain's bed. He lived alone in a small house on the outskirts of the estate which I had inherited from my father. The worthy man lighted a fire, and I was soon strengthened with a large glass of hot wine which he made me swallow. He was beside himself with joy, and he wished to go and wake the priest, to fetch the doctor, and send word to my cousins, whose château was some distance off. I had a great deal of trouble in convincing him that I dreaded the stir which would certainly be made about a man who had thus risen from the grave, and that before returning to life, I needed to collect my thoughts. I prayed. I prayed for a long time, and when I had thanked God I felt my heart revive to hope once more.

"I told you, I believe, that the illness which had fallen upon me had come at a moment when my destiny was about to be decided. The death which I had just escaped by a miracle would have destroyed a whole lifetime of happiness, and I was now thinking of the joy of renewing severed ties. Alain was looking at me with emotion, and pressing both of my hands in his. It seemed as though he feared that death would again take his master from him. I heard him murmuring thanks to the Providence which had enabled him to recognise me, and the idea came to me that I must be greatly changed. I questioned him. He silently gave me a handglass, and when I had looked into it I fell back upon the bed. Alain undoubtedly understood the cause of my terror, for he hastily snatched the glass from me; but it was too late. I had had time to see the hideous change in my features, the funereal aspect which my stay in the vault had set forever upon my face. Vainly did my old servant endeavour to console me, and above all to reassure me by declaring that the change would merely be transient, and that I should gradually return to my former appearance. I felt that he was telling me a kind falsehood to calm my despair, and that the impression of death would never be effaced from my features."

"How could you be so sure of that?" exclaimed Alcamo. "Science has made such immense progress, and even now, who knows whether with the aid of a skillful physician—"

"No man can help me," interrupted the recluse, "and, besides, it would be useless now. The sacrifice is effected."

"What do you mean?"

"Let me finish my story. The moments following upon this sad discovery were frightful, more frightful a thousand times than the hours spent in the vault in which I had thought myself buried alive forever. You have been happy, sir; you have, perhaps, loved, and you will understand me." The count gave a deep sigh. "Think then," resumed Pierre Lefort, gradually becoming more and more excited, "I had returned to life, to the world—that world where God had given me so large a share of happiness. I already pictured myself hurrying back to Paris, welcomed with open arms by those who had wept for me. But fatality blasted my dream, and I was like a shipwrecked man whom a wave overwhelms

forever at the very moment when he is at last emerging from the sea. Wrapt in gloomy silence, I did not even listen to Alain's arguments, as he endeavoured to prove to me that I ought to have the courage to live. However, after some hours of horrible agony, the struggle going on within me came to an end, and comparative calm returned. My resolution was taken. I now only had to carry it out."

"To what extreme resolve had you been urged by your despair?" inquired Alcamo, "for it was an act of despair to thus renounce—"

"You see that my despair was not complete, since I still live," interrupted the recluse. "I should tell a falsehood if I asserted that I did not at first think of suicide. It was a solution to the terrible difficulties of my new position, it was even the simplest, the most logical issue, if you like, as it would have left everything unchanged. I should have taken final refuge in death, and all would have been over, for no one would have known that for one night more I had still breathed the breath of life. But I had been brought up by a pious mother, and the religious principles inculcated in me during my childhood had never been effaced from my mind. I therefore resigned myself to live; though I did not resign myself to resuming my identity."

"But that was a chimera it is impossible to realise amid all the laws which entwine a man in our modern society," said the count; "very difficult at all events," he added, remembering his own past.

"It was much easier than you think," replied Pierre Lefort, calmly. "I made inquiries of Alain, and learned that the papers certifying my death had been correctly drawn up in Paris. The first formalities had already been gone through by my heirs. Everything conspired, you see, to enable me to remain dead."

"Undoubtedly; but to bear another name you needed papers to establish a false identity—money—"

"You forget," interrupted the recluse, "that I did not substitute myself for anybody else, for I assumed a false name. Social necessities did not exist, for I had decided never to contract any obligations in the way of family ties, such as bind other men. No certificates of birth and parentage, no family documents are needed when a man does not intend to enlist, to buy, or sell, to make a will, or to marry. No one has the right to question a person who lives alone, who injures nobody, and who suffices for his own wants."

"That is true, strictly speaking, and especially if he is not entirely without money."

"Rather than consent to resume my own name, I would have toiled with my hands, but chance had provided for the truly great difficulty which you speak of. Before starting on my journey to Paris, from which I was not destined to return alive, I had confided to Alain a large sum in gold. It was the result of some savings from my income during a long absence—I had spent nearly two years away from Europe—and I had intended to expend this money in repairing the château where I expected to live after my marriage. You will, perhaps, be astonished that, in those money-making times I did not invest this gold, but I have a horror of speculation, and my old attendant inspired me with far more confidence than any bank. Besides, I had been rich independently of this money, and had never had occasion to draw upon the fifty thousand francs which I had left with Alain. I remembered having given him a letter authorising him to keep the money if I died before my return. I had done this in order to quiet the



old man's scruples when he took charge of the money, and I am indebted to him for now being able to carry my plans into effect. Careful, like all country people, Alain had made no haste in telling my heirs of the existence of these funds, of which he believed himself the lawful owner, and at the first word of my intentions, he offered to return the gold."

"Didn't he try to dissuade you from your painful determination?" asked M. d'Alcarno.

"Yes, the worthy fellow wept and begged; he even threw himself upon his knees before me, and I think that he would never have consented to what I asked, had I not had the cruelty to show him that his resistance might seem interested, for my determination to disappear was not to be shaken. He yielded, and by daybreak everything had been agreed upon between us."

"What! he lent himself to this falsehood? He resigned himself to seeing the name of his former masters die out, and—"

"Alain obeyed me," interrupted Pierre Letort, "because he knew that although I might live a hundred years, I should still be the last of my blood. Did you think," added the recluse, bitterly, "that on stepping out of my coffin, I could have gone to ask my betrothed to marry me?"

"Your betrothed!" repeated Alcarno, who could not help shuddering with horror.

"Yes," said the unhappy man, in a hoarse voice, "at the very time when I was struck down by illness I was about to be married to a young girl whom I loved with my whole soul. I forgot to tell you that I refused to resume my identity, because I wished to spare her the pain of beholding me so frightfully changed."

Pierre Letort was silent for a moment overwhelmed by the bitterness of his recollections, and the count did not speak out of respect for his grief. "I understand everything now," he said at last, "and I approve of your conduct. I should have done as you did."

"I thank you, sir, for saying so," replied Pierre Letort. "You are a man of feeling, and I must tell you the finish. Alain consented to return to the vault to fill the empty coffin with bones, and nail the lid down again, so that the ceremony might take place on the morrow without my resurrection being known to anyone. He lent me some peasant's clothes; I took half of the sum which I had confided to him, concealed it in a belt which I placed about my waist, and on the following night I went off. I did not wish to go away without being sure that nominally, at least, I was, indeed, pent up in the grave. Alain told me that the poor had wept for me, and that on the following day my heirs had taken possession. I was then blotted out of existence, as it were, and I became Pierre Letort."

"And Pierre Letort saved Andrée," said Alcarno, slyly.

The recluse started and placed his hand upon his heart as though to still its rapid beatings. Silence again fell upon them both, and the count, leaning upon the table, fell into deep thought concerning the strange story which he had just heard. "Listen!" said he, all at once. "I think that I hear some one walking about outside."

Pierre Letort did not seem disturbed on hearing this. External matters did not interest him, and he did not fear night-prowlers. However, Alcarno, who had not the same reasons for being at ease, listened attentively. He had no positive cause for fear, but he knew that Noridet was in the neighbourhood, and instinctively distrusted him. The noise which he had heard was scarcely perceptible, and he could not account for it. It seemed

as though some one was lightly scratching the wall of the hut outside. "Are you alone here?" the count now asked, in a low tone.

"There is the fisherman who lets me this room," replied Pierre, with indifference.

"Do you think him a safe man?"

"Safe? What does that matter to me? My enemies, if I had any, would not look for me here, since no one knows that I still exist."

"Mine may have followed me here," muttered Alcamo.

"You have enemies, then?" said the recluse, looking at the count in surprise.

"Didn't I tell you that I am Andr  c's protector, and that this very day a scoundrel attempted to kill her?"

"True!" exclaimed Pierre Lefort, rising abruptly. "If the monster lives, he must hate you beyond words, but there are two of us to deal with him if he comes here."

"Then I may rely upon you?" said Alcamo, holding out his hand to the recluse, who this time did not refuse to grasp it. His reserve had not been proof against the generous sentiments of his new friend, Andr  e's defender. "Let us be prudent," now resumed the count. "I may be mistaken, and before doing anything I must see what is going on outside."

As Alcamo spoke he went softly towards the exit. Suddenly, however, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, almost of alarm. "The window!" he exclaimed, grasping Pierre Lefort's arm.

A glance had sufficed to show him the cause of the noise he had heard. The shutters had been carefully closed, and tightly fastened by some external means. What could this signify? This was what the count asked himself, and he could not think of any natural explanation. Any person trying to imprison him and his companion could only have had intentions, still Alcamo was not a man to remain long in doubt. He made but one bound to the door, wishing to rush out and catch the offender in the very act of barricading the hut. But the door was closed and secured outwardly. Some one wished to prevent them from leaving.

"We must get out of this place, cost what it may," he exclaimed.

"I will call Fritz," said Pierre Lefort.

"Where does he sleep?"

"Overhead, in the garret."

"If he were there we should have heard him."

"Why, he goes to sleep as soon as night falls, and he never notices what goes on here."

"Let us begin by finding out whether he has gone away or not."

The room where Pierre Lefort slept communicated with the upper floor by means of a ladder set against a trap-door which was always kept open. The count darted lightly up the rungs and bending down entered a kind of loft under the roof. This place had no opening and it was quite dark. Alcamo called to the fisherman, but he received no reply; and when Pierre Lefort came up in his turn with the lamp the garret was found to be empty.

The count felt the coarse pallet on which Fritz ought to have been sleeping and found that it was still warm. "That man must have been here five minutes ago," muttered Alcamo, "how did he get out?"

"I cannot understand."

"He must have crossed the lower room without our seeing him."

"True, you had your back to the ladder and I did not once look up."

"Then it must be he who closed the door and window on the outside."

"Yes, but with what motive?"

Alcarno reflected for a moment and then remarked: "Whatever the motive may be, it is evident that he is plotting something against us."

"I rather think that he has gone to cast his nets in the Rhine."

"Or to fetch people to murder us."

"But he has no interest in committing such a crime."

"How do you know that? He must, in the first place, be aware that you are rich."

"How? I live more poorly than even he does, and I brought but little luggage with me."

"But how about the gold which your old servant returned to you—"

"That gold is here," said Pierre Lefort, touching his belt.

"Well, how do you know that, while you were asleep, he has never bent over your bed and felt your treasure?"

"Asleep!" repeated the recluse, bitterly. "It is many nights since I closed my eyes. The unhappy never sleep."

"But you pay this man. You also pay the boatmen who take you to the falls. Everything is known in a country where there are very few tourists just now, and, I am sure, that you are considered to be a rich foreigner."

"Perhaps so," said Pierre, shaking his head; "but if Fritz wanted to kill me, to rob me, he wouldn't have chosen a night when I was not alone."

"That's true," replied the count, and he added: "Then all this is directed against me, against the man who is watching over Andrée. I must have been followed; some one saw me come in, and that fellow Fritz has been paid to shut me up here. Ah! we have already lost a deal of precious time, still even if I have to set fire to these miserable boards, I must in a quarter of an hour be on the road to Schaffhausen."

As Alcarno spoke he darted round the loft like a lion in a cage from which he is trying to break loose. Suddenly Pierre Lefort bounded towards the trap door. "Fire, did you say? fire! look! look!"

Alcarno quickly turned round and could not help growing pale. A sinister glare now filled the room on the ground floor, and smoke was already rising to the loft. "Ah! I see it all now!" said Alcarno, grinding his teeth. "I know what hand lighted those flames!"

"Come, we may still escape!" cried Pierre Lefort, rushing towards the ladder.

The count was about to follow him, but he realised the futility of the attempt. All of the lower portion of the hut was already burning. The dry wood was crackling ominously, and the fire was being fanned into increased violence by a strong westerly wind. It was idle to try to escape through this furnace, and the fragile building, undermined by the flames, would soon fall to the ground.

"Help me!" suddenly cried Alcarno. At the foot of Fritz's bed he had first espied two axes, which the fisherman had probably used in felling some pine trees to build his hut. Pierre Lefort did not ask what he was required to do, but together with Alcarno he began vigorously attacking the roof.

The wood flew about in fragments at each hurried blow, and in less than a minute they had made a hole in the planks which covered the hut; however, it was necessary to enlarge the aperture sufficiently to allow a man to pass through it, and the fire was gaining upon them with incredible rapidity. The count hacked away without uttering a word, and Lefort also worked with such ardour that his hood fell back, revealing his face, but he did not pause to draw it forward.

"The floor is beginning to burn under our feet," he said, at last, but without evincing any great alarm.

"Twenty strokes more and we shall be able to pass through," replied the count, who handled his axe with wonderful energy. Indeed, the aperture was perceptibly larger, but the flames now rose above the trap-door, and the smoke pouring into the loft began to blind the two toilers.

"One of us may perish, and the other may escape," said Alcamo, suddenly. "Promise me that if you survive me, you will protect the young girl whom you saved to-day."

"I swear it, but it is you who must live."

"The hole is large enough, now," cried the count; "go out the first." Then, dragging Fritz's bed under the opening, he helped Pierre Lefort to hoist himself on to the roof, and a few seconds later both friends stood upon the smoking beams.

They were not yet saved, for the flames rose up all round the shanty, and it was necessary to dart through the fiery cordon without the least hesitation, under the penalty of being swallowed up in the blaze.

"The Rhine is there before us," said the count at once.

"I understand," replied Pierre Lefort, pressing his hand. And they then simultaneously darted through the flames, trying to reach the edge of the roof which hung over the river.

### XXIII.

It is a far cry from Schaffhausen to the Bois de Boulogne, and on the Sunday which followed upon the fire at Fritz's hut, nothing was said on the Longchamps racecourse about the dramatic scenes which had taken place near the cataract of the Rhine. There had, indeed, been an account in the Paris papers of the marvellous escape of two ladies, whose names were not given, but this was stale news by the end of the week. That Sunday, indeed, it was the last day of the spring races, the public scattered over the sward of Longchamps, extending from the cascade to the Seine, were entirely bent upon amusing themselves. There was a dense throng, and, indeed, the raceground seemed too small for so many spectators. There were three rows of carriages against the rope running along the course, and every minute fresh eight-spring barouches and victorias drove up. Fashionable people and fast folks alike seemed as usual to have agreed upon meeting at Longchamps, and any number of toilets were displayed in the bright May sunlight. Quiet people, who had come on foot, were not wanting either, and, without speaking of the unpretentious cits seated on the grass, there were thousands of sporting-men amid the labyrinth of wheels and shafts. Clerks and counter-jumpers elbowed wealthy men whose bets amounted to hundreds of louis; but, to tell the truth, the sport was simply an excuse; even the obscurest "lady of the lake" had a swarm of admirers about her who were utterly indifferent to the equine species. There was, also, the nobility—titled heiresses, and noble gentlemen, with green tickets at their button-holes, the "open sesame" to the weighing inclosure. Elegant women adorned the stands, which, with all the variegated parasols, looked like hill-sides strewn with poppies and corn-flowers. The reporters of sporting papers might boldly declare that "all Paris" was there, that "all Paris" which, prior to the collapse of the second empire, had its staff, its rank and its file, and historians.

The first race had just been run; the winner was returning to the paddock at a slow pace, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd, and the lucky backers were swarming round the bookmakers waiting for their cash. In the front row of carriages, and at a few paces from the winning-post, Madame and Mademoiselle Brossin displayed themselves in a superb landau. The baroness had donned for the occasion a bright green dress, a jonquil hat, and a shawl brilliant with gold thread, without counting a chain as thick as a cable, and three rows of bracelets. Her daughter had abstained from indulging in such a fantastic costume, and although her toilet was a trifle eccentric, it was within the limits allowed to a young lady. However, Henriette did not look nearly so blooming or so good-humoured as her mother. There was a feverish glow in her eyes; her cheeks were sunken, and she seemed to experience secret suffering. She paid no attention to handsome Théodore Vergoncey, who, standing at the door of the carriage, was conversing with the baroness. The latter had lowered her usually trumpet like voice, and was softly saying: "It is simply impossible. The baron again refused, yesterday, to give me some money which I asked him for my dressmaker, and he is in a horrid humour this morning."

"I am afraid that Alfred cannot wait," sighed Vergoncey, "and as luck has it, I am very much cramped myself, just now. If that were not the case, believe me—"

"Hush! here is my husband," whispered the lady.

And, indeed, M. Brossin was coming towards them with two serious-looking individuals, who appeared to be men of business, and his gloomy face presaged a bad reception for any one who might venture to ask him for money. Vergoncey, no doubt, thought the moment unfavourable for coming forward, for bowing to the baroness, he slipped away, and joined Alfred, who was fluttering about Mademoiselle Argentine's victoria. The banker's son and heir did not appear to be in much better spirits than his papa, and he was plainly but little interested in his conversation with the damsel, for, as soon as he caught sight of Vergoncey, he relinquished "spooning," and ran towards him. "Well?" said he, slipping his arm through Théodore's. This question was curt, but his look spoke volumes, and one did not need to be a reader of faces to guess all the importance which young Brossin attached to his friend's reply.

"Well," said Théodore, with a dejected look, "it seems that the baron is out of sorts, and Madame Brossin thinks it is a bad time to say anything to him about money, so that we had better wait for a few days."

"A few days!" cried the presumptive heir; "but to-morrow that cursed note is due, and that fellow Ménager won't wait twenty-four hours."

"Bah! money-lenders always wait when they can make it pay, and besides, a protest is no killing matter."

"Of course not, and if I merely dreaded a summons to pay, but—" The imprudent Alfred no doubt realised, just in time, that he was about to say too much, for he stopped short and ended his sentence with a gesture of despair.

"Shall I go to see Ménager and speak to him?" said the consoling Vergoncey. "I will talk to him about my property in the Gâtinais, and when I have done that, I hope that my security will—"

"No, no!" interrupted young Brossin, in the utmost consternation; "I would rather settle matters with him myself." His confusion did not

escape Vergoncey, who looked at him keenly ; however, Alfred made haste to change the subject.

"Do you know whether Jules Noridet is here ?" he asked, with an air of assumed indifference.

"Oh, yes, he must be. It is impossible that he should be absent from the last of the spring races," gravely answered the handsome Théodore, who had always professed the utmost veneration for the elegant Noridet.

"But I heard it said at the club yesterday that he was travelling," urged Alfred.

"It would be contrary to all his habits if he were away now, and indeed, even if he were three hundred leagues from Paris yesterday, I'll wager that he must be on the turf to-day."

Alfred shuddered. He also was of opinion that Noridet must have returned, and before his eyes, which stared vacantly at the imperial stand, he saw the forged signature dance by in letters of flame. However, like a genuine dandy of the time, M. Brossin, the younger, disliked gloomy thoughts, and so, after a moment's meditation, he snapped his fingers and spoke these remarkable words : "Well, I really shouldn't be a smart fellow if I didn't get out of this scrape ; and I am a smart fellow."

"Didn't you tell me that you had a heavy bet on Vermilion ?" asked Vergoncey, so as to divert his friend's thoughts.

"Sixty louis, my good fellow, and at thirty to one ; so that, if I have any luck, I shall have thirty-five nice bank-notes to hand over to that fellow, Ménager," and, on the strength of this hope, Alfred forthwith indulged in a hop and a skip, to the great terror of the handsome Théodore, who thought a great deal of propriety.

"Ah ! I am as thirsty as a wolf," exclaimed Alfred ; "let us go to the drinking-stand, and wet our whistles with a bottle of champagne."

Vergoncey, who always accepted treats which did not cost him anything, needed no urging, and the two friends walked towards the tent where refreshments were sold. On the way, however, Alfred suddenly started, as though he had trodden upon a snake. He found himself just in front of the Rue Vannean money-lender.

The usurer looked the same as usual. He had the same carefully shaven face, the same equivocal smile, and the same robust figure. But the blue spectacles, with which he hid his piercing eyes, were now provided with side-pieces, and his square-cut chin was buried in a huge white cravat, while on his head he carried a broad-brimmed hat, brought down carefully over his forehead. The rest of his costume comprised a long overcoat with countless pockets, trousers of an undecided tint, and big, square-toed shoes. He looked exactly like a Jew pedlar. Alfred, apart from the serious reasons which made him wish to avoid such a meeting, did not care to be seen talking to such a vulgar-looking man at the races. Mademoiselle Argentine might spy him, and if any member of the Gnat Club came by, Alfred, dandy as he was, would be convicted of knowing "common people." For this reason, after the first shock of surprise, he tried to slip away among the carriages ; but Ménager quietly stopped him, and took up a position which showed that he was firmly determined to interview his debtor.

"I am delighted to have the honour of meeting Monsieur Alfred Brossin," he said, politely raising his hand to the monumental hat, which seemed to be screwed on to his cranium.

"So I am to meet you—certainly—of course—delighted. It is unex-

pected, I must say ; still, Monsieur Ménager—" stammered the unlucky dandy, shifting from one foot to the other, like a turkey on a hot gridiron.

"I beg your pardon for taking the liberty to accost you here," interrupted the money-lender, in his deep voice, which made a chill run down Alfred's back ; "but, as the chance offers, you will excuse me for reminding you that to-morrow is the 15th of May—the day when our little bill falls due."

"I'm aware of it—I'm perfectly well aware of it," murmured young Brossin, hardly knowing what he was saying.

"Oh, I did not doubt your punctuality, pray believe me, sir," resumed M. Ménager, settling his spectacles with a gesture familiar to all men of his calling. "What ! would the son of one of our leading bankers—a prince of finance—be remiss ? No, no, of course not. Such a signature is as good as bullion ; and I was writing only yesterday to my patrons to tell them that I had never sent them anything safer than your bill."

"Ah ! you wrote that to your patrons ?"

"Of course, I did ! for, you see, country capitalists are such uneasy people. These worthy folks don't understand anything about business. Ah, if they had only worked with your father, now ! But no, they only understand interest at ten per cent, and payment on presentation. Narrow minds, my dear sir—narrow minds !"

"But I thought—I fancied—that with security and by paying a commission, one might—"

"Might what, my dear sir ?" asked the money-lender, in the most insinuating tone.

"I thought that I might be able to renew," said Alfred, boldly, led on by the amiable manner of Ménager.

"Impossible, with country people, my dear sir—utterly impossible ! They have a mania for being paid on the very day. It is mere prejudice—routine—for money is made to make money, and it does make money when you renew ; but these gentlemen have their own way of looking at things, and they are very much behind the times, I must confess it. Ah, that's not my way of looking at business ; and if I were the master—"

"You would advance me the money ?" exclaimed young Brossin.

"Twice, three times, ten times over !" replied the money-lender, with apparent earnestness ; "but, as I had the honour of telling you when you came to my office last November, I am only an humble agent in this matter—only an humble agent."

Alfred let a groan escape him, and tried to turn it into a fit of coughing, muttering inarticulate words. M. Vergoncey stood beside his friend, but, so far, he had said nothing. When he saw that young Brossin was out of countenance, however, he thought that the time had come for intervening. "Come now, Monsieur Ménager," said he, with a careless air, "your patrons are not Turks, deuce take it ! and we know what mere talk amounts to. With five per cent more and a good commission, they would give a renewal of three months, I'm sure."

"To whom have I the honour of speaking ?" gravely asked the usurer, now pretending to catch sight of the handsome Théodore for the first time.

"To Monsieur Vergoncey. I am a landowner in the Gâtinais. Your correspondents have only to make inquiries in the department where my estate lies."

"I am delighted, sir, to make your acquaintance ; the more so as I had the pleasure of knowing your father."

"Ah, you knew—"

"Your father, yes, at the Marquis de Perthes' place, and I did not expect to see his son here."

This remark, although made in the politest tone, seemed to affect Vergoncey like a blow on the head, for he dreaded nothing more than hearing the author of his being mentioned. Vergoncey the elder had been a mere *factotum*. So Alfred's auxiliary was reduced to silence, and deemed it prudent to say no more.

"I was saying, my dear Monsieur Brossin," resumed M. Ménager, "that I was delighted at having so punctual a person as yourself to deal with. I shall telegraph to-morrow to my people that the thirty-five thousand francs will be paid before noon, and I am sure that, at the earliest opportunity, they will be only too glad to do business with you again."

"Before noon?" muttered Alfred, chewing the big end of his cigar.

"Heaven knows," continued the money-lender, "that it isn't because these gentlemen have the slightest apprehension; for, even supposing that by an impossible chance you were a trifle pushed, we should go straight to Monsieur Jules Noridet, and a millionaire like him would not make any difficulty about giving us the thirty-five thousand francs."

The handsome Théodore pricked up his ears on hearing Ménager speak of making Noridet pay, and Alfred suffered so much, being, as it were, on hot coals, that he resolved to break off the conversation at any cost. However, the usurer now took his leave. "Your servant, my dear sir," said he, as young Brossin started off. "To-morrow morning I will send to your house, unless you prefer that I should send direct to Monsieur Noridet."

Alfred made no reply. He dragged Vergoncey to the refreshment tent in hot haste, and did not even see Ménager get into a cab which was waiting for him on the sward at a hundred paces or so from the line of carriages.

"What did that money-monger mean by his gabble?" asked Théodore.

"How is Noridet mixed up in this matter?"

"Let us have a drink," answered Alfred, in a voice choked by emotion. And, without looking at Vergoncey, who had been visibly disturbed by the usurer's words, young Brossin darted like a whirlwind into the tent where a crowd of persons of both sexes were already eating and drinking. He immediately ordered a bottle of champagne, and began to drain glass after glass.

"Fortunately there is Vermilion left me, that dear Vermilion," he sputtered out amid his growing intoxication. "He's by Prussian Blue and Casilda, you know, and can't possibly be beaten."

"The fact is," said Vergoncey, seriously, "that Vermilion's performances—"

"Thirty-six thousand, my friend, thirty-six thousand to pocket this afternoon, and then down with Ménager!"

"Who have you bet with?" asked the prudent Théodore.

"With a very rich young man who drove here with a mail coach and four horses, and— Ah! dash it! what a pretty girl!" suddenly exclaimed the intoxicated dandy, who had just espied a young person standing near the counter alone.

Young Brossin was not mistaken as to the girl's good looks. It would have been difficult to find a more charming face than hers. She was mixing a glass of currant-syrup, and did not notice the bystanders, but Alfred was merely timid with his creditors, and so, without more ado, he walked up to this young girl.



The bell had just rung to announce a new race and almost all the inmates of the tent were hurrying towards the course. "You are charming, mademoiselle," said Alfred, "and a little champagne would make you look still better."

The young girl blushed and drew back without replying to this stupid gallantry.

"Come, my beauty, drink this!" continued young Brossiu, offering her a glass of sparkling wine.

"Let me alone, sir! I don't know you," rejoined the young girl, curtly.

"What! are you putting on airs?" continued Alfred, convinced that he was talking to a gay young "damsel of the lake."

"You are an insolent rascal!" exclaimed a voice behind him.

"What are you meddling with?" answered Alfred, turning and facing a tall young man, with a dusky skin but extremely well dressed, who had just come up.

"I am meddling with what concerns me," replied the new-comer with a firmness that startled young Brossin.

"How can my actions concern you?" asked the baron's son and heir.

"This young lady is with me, and I forbid your insulting her; if you persist I shall chastise you."

"Will you, indeed? This is really funny, really funny, I must say!" stammered Alfred, at the same time preparing to beat a retreat.

Vergoncey, who was by no means partial to disturbances, pulled his friend by the sleeve to get him away, but the noise of the quarrel had attracted some persons who had lingered near the counter, and a circle had already formed around the two adversaries. The young girl who had been the occasion of the quarrel had caught hold of the arm of her defender, and was trying to calm him, but she did not appear to be very successful. Unfortunately for Alfred, who had intended to depart quietly, two members of his club were among the bystanders. The thought that they were looking on lent him a little courage, and he felt the necessity for putting on a lofty air. "Well, my friend," said he, "you think that you are at the Barrière, eh? and want to try your fists. But that is all very well for lackeys, it doesn't suit me!"

"What! you puppy! I'll teach you to talk about lackeys!" exclaimed the mulatto, breaking away from the young girl to throw himself upon the baron's heir.

As usual in such cases, several bystanders intervened and no blows ensued. Alfred, screened by one or two fellows of his own set, continued playing his part however. "Swords! pistols! sabres! anything you like!" he cried, in his shrillest voice. "Give me your card—but no; you can't have any card—of course not!"

And, thereupon, he turned away, followed by the faithful Vergoncey.

"I don't need any card," called out the mulatto, "I know you very well, and my name is Fortoto. To-morrow, I shall be your man, Monsieur Brossin, junior!"

The antagonists might have continued for some time complimenting one another in this way, like the Greeks of the Iliad; but an incident which might easily have been foreseen now put a stop to this battle of words. The young girl, whom the new-comer had so energetically protected, fainted away, and a reaction took place among the bystanders, some of whom had held Fortoto back. Nine times out of ten the man in the right is the one that the crowd takes sides against. Fortoto was released, and the people present

gathered around the poor girl, who had fallen upon a chair, and appeared quite unconscious.

It would have been better for Alfred had he now retired, but he was seized with the unlucky idea of keeping up his blustering. "Do you hear that clown, there?" said he to the men of his club, who were near by listening to him, "that coward bawls out his name as though he were a Montmorency, and imagines that I am going to fight with a nigger like him."

Meantime the people round about had succeeded in reviving the young girl who was none other than Louise Bernard.

"What a name!" continued Alfred, "Fortoto! Imagine anyone being named Fortoto! Could *anybody* fight with a man named Fortoto?"

But just at this moment an unexpected diversion took place, for a young gentleman of elegant appearance appeared, and at sight of him, Brossin turned very pale. Everything showed he was a man accustomed to good society. Tall, slender, and of light complexion, his attire as well as his demeanour was that of a man of the world. "Those who won't fight with Monsicur Fortoto, must fight with me," he said, setting his hand upon Alfred's shoulder.

Alfred had at once recognised him, for he stammered piteously: "You, Monsieur de Monville! Yes, I will fight—certainly—of course—only too happy—but why? I don't understand you."

"You don't understand why I wish to fight?" asked the new comer, in a very distinct tone.

"No—unless—our bet—our bet—on Vermilion—"

"Enough, sir! enough!" haughtily replied Monsieur de Monville. "I mean to fight with you because you have insulted a young girl in a cowardly manner."

"*Cowardly* is perhaps rather strong," began the handsome Théodore, "and I think that—"

However, he went no further, for a look from Fortoto's defender stopped the words in his throat.

"But, indeed, sir," exclaimed young Brossin, in a tone of emotion, "I beg of you to believe that if I had known—but, you understand, when a woman is alone at the spring races, why you know—"

"So, because a woman is *alone*, you think you have a right to insult her?" asked M. de Monville, sharply.

"I could not guess that she was an acquaintance of yours," said Alfred, in all simplicity.

"Well, I just found out that you were a coward, and now I discover that you are a fool." This reply fell upon the dandy like a stroke of lightning, and he could not find a word to utter in reply. "My seconds will be at your house to-morrow morning, sir," added M. de Monville. And turning his back upon the members of the Gnat Club, who were in a state of amazement, he approached Fortoto, who still stood beside the frightened girl.

Vergoncey now dragged his terrified friend away, and they left the tent, followed by two club men, who were greatly scandalized by the cowardly behaviour of their fellow member. "Here's a pretty to-do!" grumbled Alfred, "here I am with a duel on my hands, and that chap Ménager has to be settled with to-morrow, why I have a great mind to go off for a tour in Normandy."

"The club would not like that," muttered the handsome Théodore.

"Well, if Vermilion doesn't win," cried the baron's heir presumptive, "the only thing I shall be able to do will be to kick the bucket."

While Alfred was conducting himself in this manner, Baron Brossin, who had no thought of the races, was walking about on the raceground near the Longchamps mill. M. Brossin was usually a firm patron of the weighing-stand, and he could not have isolated himself in this way without serious reasons. He had left the two grave-looking persons with whom he had previously approached the baroness's landau, and he was now walking about with an old man, leaning upon his arm and talking with great animation. This person was short and stout, with a cunning face, and though his hair was quite white his look was anything but venerable. "You think, then, that the Bank of France won't advance us anything on our Sicilian paper?" said the Baron.

"It would, perhaps, have done so last month, but now that it is known on 'Change that the mining grant has been refused us, the bank won't lend us a copper."

This answer was given drily, and it seemed as though the speaker had no desire to propitiate himself with M. Brossin. And yet his attire, manners, and general appearance were those of a clerk; in fact, it was not necessary to be very observing to guess that the baron was condescending to walk about with his cashier or head accountant.

"What of the bills which we sent in yesterday?"

"They were refused at the discount office," said the clerk, abruptly.

"That cannot be possible! My signature has never even been discussed, and my credit must still be good, for no one knows—"

"I think, on the contrary, that everybody does know something. Why, yesterday, there was a talk on 'Change that you were ruined."

"But who can have spread the news?"

"Ah! that's the point! that is what nobody ever knows. An unlicensed broker told it to a cashier who repeated it to our messenger? Where did he get hold of it? That is more than I can tell you."

"Then, the failure of Fassitt & Lunley, the fall of the Pacific Railroad stock, and all that is known already?"

"It was known two days ago; and if you had done me the honour to receive me yesterday in your private office, I could have told you all that was being said."

"But, yesterday, I was obliged to go to Chantilly."

"To look at the stables of that Wallachian Prince, who has begun to bank with you? That was undoubtedly a useful journey, but a man cannot go to Chantilly and manage a bank in Paris at the same time."

"I don't need your reproaches," said the baron, abruptly, "advice is what I asked you for."

"What advice can I give you? to liquidate? You wouldn't do so."

"Are you crazy? I haven't come to that, I presume."

"Not quite yet, as we still have seventeen days between now and the end of the month."

The baron shivered as if he felt cold, and yet the sun was bright and warm. "How much have we to pay?" demanded he, after a short silence.

"Nine hundred and sixty-two thousand francs before the first of June."

"And we have in hand—"

"Eighty-six thousand francs plus three hundred and twelve thousand francs in bills which are not due till June, July, and August."

"I have got out of worse difficulties than this," said M. Brossin, with a careless air, which did not agree with his anxious face.

"I don't deny that, but times are not the same now."

"Why not? I have my house on the Boulevard Haussmann, and my estate in Normandy, which are worth a great deal more than the amount which I had in hand when I arrived in Paris."

"But you cannot turn them into money in a fortnight's time."

"I can borrow."

"On mortgages? A banker! Then, indeed, your credit will be gone forever."

These discouraging replies fell heavily upon the baron. He let go of his companion's arm, and looked down at the grass as though he expected that some suggestions would rise to him from the sward. "Ah, if I could only get Henriette married!" he murmured, switching the herbage with his cane.

"Oh, yes, to Monsieur Noridet, that fine fellow with three millions of money," said the cashier; "but there is nothing to show that he would care to let his father-in-law have any of his funds. Besides, the match doesn't seem to suit him."

The baron coloured, and raised his head. "Do you know that you are becoming very insolent?" said he, in an angry tone.

The cashier did not appear to pay any attention to this remark. He merely shrugged his shoulders. It is certain that, if there had been any witnesses to this conversation, they would have thought it strange that the cashier should show such small respect for his master. The baron must have been seriously compromised in the knowledge of this inferior to tolerate such familiar remarks and such an insulting manner. After a few minutes' mental struggle he succeeded, no doubt, in calming himself, for the tone in which he again spoke was very mild. "Come, now, Bouscareau," said he. "we have been working together for thirty years, and it seems to me that our good understanding has been mutually profitable. It isn't the right time to quarrel when trouble is at hand."

"Trouble? Speak for yourself. I have no trouble to fear."

"Yes, I know that you have been more prudent than myself, and that your little fortune is quite safe."

"Little, indeed," said the clerk, with a grimace, which might either have signified mockery or malignity. "My gold has not made millions like yours."

"That is no fault of mine, for on the day we started we started alike, and with equal shares."

"The day? no, it was in the night."

This remark probably contained some allusion which was not very agreeable to the baron, for he abstained from making a retort. "At all events," said he, with strange earnestness, "each of us did what suited him, and I don't reproach you for refusing to join me in my ventures, besides, I have never asked you to help me with your capital."

"You have done right there, for I should have refused," replied the stout man, in a brutal tone.

"You had and still have the right to do that," replied M. Brossin, without wincing, "but you cannot desert a firm where you have always been cashier, and a friend who has always given you a part of his profits without ever making you share his losses."

"Who says anything about deserting anybody or anything? I have no interest in withdrawing, as I am quite sure I shan't be compromised."

This assertion made the baron shrug his shoulders, but he thought fit to keep to himself his views as to his cashier's future prospects. "Now," said he, "I ask you whether, in your opinion, there is any way of saving the situation?"

"There is one way," said Bouscareau, drily.

"And you haven't yet told me of it."

"No. I hesitate about doing so."

"Why is that?"

"Because you now lack the will and energy that you once possessed."

"You are mistaken. I would do anything to avert ruin."

"Very well; then you need only to sell to-morrow on 'Change the two thousand bonds of the Northern Railway Line that have been in my safe ever since October."

"Count d'Alcamo's deposit!" exclaimed the baron.

"Exactly," replied the cashier, without evincing the slightest emotion.

"But you know very well that it may be claimed at any moment."

"Not by him, as he is dead."

"There is no legal proof of that, and besides, he must have left heirs."

"Do you imagine that if those heirs had known of this deposit, they would have deferred putting in an appearance so long?"

The baron fell into deep meditation, and his contracted brow showed how deeply he was stirred. M. Bouscareau looked at him with an expression which fully revealed the contempt he entertained for his superior. "It would be abuse of confidence," muttered the unfortunate banker, "a case for the assizes and imprisonment."

"I told you that your energy was all gone," said the cashier, coldly. Whereupon the baron passed his hand over his forehead, and bit his lips. "It seems to me that you were not so squeamish when we were both down there at—" added Bouscareau.

"Hold your tongue! hold your tongue! Do you wish to ruin us both, you rascal?"

"Come, now, do you think that the horses on the course can hear us?" said the stout man.

Indeed nobody was paying the least attention to the pair. Within hearing there was only a cab, no doubt unoccupied, and the driver of which had approached the course to watch the race.

"No matter," said the baron, "I do not care to talk of that here. Come to my house to-night. I will wait for you in my private room; but now I must return to the ladies. I must not be seen talking so long with you."

M. Bouscareau made no objection, and they were about to separate, when the door of the cab near by slowly opened. The noise made by the door made M. Brossin look round, and he saw that a gentleman had just alighted from the cab, and was coming forward with his hand extended and his lips curved into a smile. He looked like some one who sees a friend after a long absence, and the baron, quite surprised at seeing a person whom he did not know, coming towards him with so aimable and familiar an air, stopped short. It seemed to him that he had somewhere seen this person before, but it was impossible for him, as the phrase goes, to "set a name on his face." The stranger was tall, of vigorous build, and very distinguished bearing. The baron concluded that he must be some old customer who had banked with him, and at all events, it would not do him any harm to speak to a man belonging to good society. He therefore

assumed an attitude of mingled courtesy and reserve, waiting for the newcomer to accost him, but in point of fact he was not without a little uneasiness, for he said to himself that the occupant of the cab might perhaps have overheard his conversation with Bouseareau.

"Good day, my dear baron," said the stranger, eagerly taking the banker's hand; "I am very glad that chance has brought us together here."

M. Brossin stood with his mouth wide open and his eyes starting out of his head. The stranger's voice awoke a confused recollection in his mind, but the more he gazed at his face, the more he feared recognising him.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, with a show of hesitation; "but my memory is very bad, and—"

"What! really! am I so changed as all that?" cried the stranger, bursting into a laugh. "This is the consequence of travelling in warm climates."

"Ah, you have been travelling," stammered the baron, who was visibly growing paler.

"You must have known that, my dear friend, and I beg of you to believe that if I had been in this hemisphere you would not have waited so long without hearing from me. And, by the bye, I ought to apologise to you for leaving Monville without even saying good-bye."

This remark came as a terrible flash of light to the unhappy banker. "Count d'Aleamo!" he exclaimed recoiling.

"Himself, my excellent friend, himself, and very glad to see you again."

"I also am glad," stammered M. Brossin; "but you can understand my surprise, my emotion—"

"Why? Ah! I see! you did not expect to see me get out of a cab in the midst of the races. But how can I help that? I have only just arrived in Paris, and I have not had time to set up an establishment, with carriages of my own, and so on."

"Oh, it is not that," muttered the baron, still quite stunned by this unexpected blow.

"Can you have believed me dead?" asked Aleamo, gaily. "I remember now, that I was told to-day that there had been a rumour to that effect."

"Yes, such was the case," said M. Brossin, trying to recover a little calmness; "and I must confess, for my part, that the indications coinciding with your disappearance, made me believe you dead."

"Oh, I confess that it was a serious breach of politeness on my part, to go off as I did without taking leave of you, just like a bankrupt trying to escape from his creditors." The baron frowned.

"Fortunately, however, I did not take my money with me," resumed Aleamo, in a still gayer tone, "as most of my personal property is deposited at your bank."

"It is still there," said M. Brossin, hurriedly.

"I am sure of that, my dear baron, and I have never given the deposit a thought since I went away."

The banker's face cleared. M. Bouscareau listened to this talk, without saying a word, but he looked at the count with strange persistency, and it seemed as though he were scrutinizing his frank and open countenance for a resemblance to some one he had known. Aleamo undoubtedly observed the manner with which the cashier examined him, for he suddenly

said to the baron: "This gentleman is undoubtedly one of your friends, and I am delighted, I am sure, to—"

"Monsieur Bouscareau, my cashier," replied M. Brossin hurriedly; "I ought to have introduced him to you, but I fancied you knew him."

"No, indeed, to my great regret," said the count, graciously; "you know that I always transacted all my little matters with you, but I shall, no doubt, soon have the pleasure of seeing this gentleman in the exercise of his functions."

At these words, which seemed to announce the count's intention to pay an early visit to the cash-box which contained his bonds, the baron could not help turning pale, and M. Bouscareau probably thought this a good time for disappearing, for he ceremoniously saluted the count and humbly said: "I have the honour to offer you my respects, gentlemen," and thereupon he vanished, his employer making no attempt to detain him.

Indeed Baron Brossin longed to be alone with Alcamo to ask the latter about his adventures, and especially to ascertain his intentions. "Really, count," said he, trying to hide his uneasiness, "I can hardly believe in the unexpected happiness of your return. Just fancy, your hat was found with a pool of blood below the cliff, and proceedings were even begun against two fellows who were suspected of having murdered you."

"I hope they were let off," laughed Alcamo. "The deuce! I should have reproached myself all my life long had any innocent man been compromised on my account."

"Oh, do not let that affair trouble you. These poor devils escaped from the prison at Dieppe, and they have never been seen since or even heard of; everything was mysterious in the affair."

"It ought to cure me of my mania for politics."

"What! did you leave Monville so suddenly on account of political matters?"

"Yes, we Italians are always conspiring, more or less, you know, and while I was quietly enjoying myself on your delightful estate, some of my fellow countrymen, who were exiles in England, crossed the channel in a sailing-boat to offer me the command of an insurrection in Sicily."

"Nothing was ever said about such an affair on 'Change," remarked the banker.

"No, indeed! I should think not! It failed before it broke out, and I was nearly taken by the Piedmontese, who would quietly have shot me. I was forced to fly, and availed myself of a vessel bound for Brazil. However, everything is all right, as I have returned safe and sound, and have had the pleasure of meeting you."

"I can assure you, count, that the pleasure is mutual."

"I have no doubt of that, my dear baron, and I regret my own rudeness. It was only urgent necessity that forced me to embark on a rough November night without even taking time to say farewell. But I will tell you all my adventures in detail one of these days. My affair was a perfect Odyssey. Meantime, permit me to ask after your family."

"A thousand thanks, count; Madame Brossin will be very glad to see you again, and my daughter would never forgive me if I delayed telling her at once about your return. The ladies are here, and if you will allow me, I—"

"No! no! baron, I might frighten them, for they would certainly take me for a ghost. I should much prefer it if you would prepare them—and say that I will call on them to-morrow."

"As you please, count; we shall always feel honoured to receive you."

"As for to-day, my dear friend," now remarked Alcamo, "I have a great desire to see the races. Let us look on together, and tell me, if you please, something about the horses that are going to run."

"What! you don't know anything about them, count?" exclaimed the banker, who was delighted at being able to make himself agreeable to a man whom he feared, as a criminal fears his judge.

"Just remember that I have come from abroad, and am ignorant of everything that is going on here. I have scarcely even heard of the illustrious Vermilion."

"Ah! that's a fine horse, count. And see, the signal has just been given for the start; from where we stand too we can see the winning-post very well." As the baron spoke, the horses passed by like a whirlwind before the spectators gathered near the mill of Longchamps. The baron pointed out Vermilion to the count, whom, from that moment, seemed to be greatly interested in the races.

The favourite seemed to justify the preference of the sporting fraternity, for while a stable companion made the running he kept in a good position, and at the last turn went ahead of all his competitors. The count did not lose sight of him for an instant, and if M. Brossin could have guessed why he was so greatly interested, even turning pale with excitement, he would have felt less security as to his future prospects. The five animals in the race now reached the distance, and Vermilion came ahead triumphantly, the public already shouting and clapping their hands with delight.

"He wins!" exclaimed the baron, who thought that Alcamo would be pleased at this.

But, suddenly, a loud clamour arose from the crowd, and the count quietly replied: "Not yet."

In fact the favourite had been beaten a hundred yards from the post, and a rival, who had crept up behind him, had won the race easily by two lengths!

"What a pity!" cried the banker.

"The fact is, that I pity the people who backed Vermilion," said the count, whose meaning the banker failed to understand.

#### XXIV.

JULES NORIDET, whose appearance young Brossin so greatly dreaded, and for a very good reason, had not been present at the last spring races at Longchamps; still he had returned to Paris. For three days he had been in town, but no one had so far seen him, either on the boulevard, or at the opera, or even at the club, where as a rule he always put in an appearance between midnight and one a.m.

This gay fellow, who had once never failed to show himself in public on all favourable occasions, now kept to his room, breakfasted in the morning on a cup of tea prepared by his man-servant, and in the evening had his dinner sent him from the *Café Anglais*. In spite of his wealth, Noridet had not yet abandoned the second-floor rooms in the *Rue du Helder*, where he had spent the gayest years of his life. His retired existence was considered to be to his credit, as it was attributed to his grief on account of his uncle's death. The truth was, however, that he did not care to purchase any house property with the money which he had inherited; he pre-



ferred to hold himself in readiness to leave France at any moment, for, during the last six months, he had not had an hour's quietness; indeed, the fortune he had acquired at such a fearful price, had brought him only fear and remorse.

Brought back to Dieppe and cured of his wound, after the duel near the Black Rock, Noridet had returned to Paris in a thorough state of prostration. However, after a month's almost absolute retirement he had gradually recovered from the shock, and hearing no more of the count he began once more to think of enjoying life. At the same time the thought of his invisible tyrant thoroughly enraged him. He dared not act openly against the Count d'Alcamo, but he knew that the secret upon which his fate depended was now known to Fortoto and to Louise Bernard, and by means of private detectives he made several attempts to discover what had become of them. But Louise had suddenly left her home and nobody knew where she had gone. All that Noridet ascertained was that she had removed her father from the lunatic asylum where he had been placed, and that there had been but little opposition to her doing so. There was nothing to show that Bernard had really had anything to do with his employer's disappearance, and besides, his mental condition excited pity. Noridet concluded that Louise and Fortoto had followed the count, and failing to discover the whereabouts of any of them, he began to believe that the truce granted him by his powerful enemy would be permanent. This idea led him to combine a new plan which he decided to carry out during the spring. It is needless to say that this new plan embraced a fresh crime. The poisoner persuaded himself that the count's threat to denounce him was only an attempt to frighten him, and that the true danger would be the production of the will, which disinherited him. Now, this will, according to all appearance, was mainly to Andrée's benefit, and it was easy to find out where she was staying. She lived with her godmother at M. Mornac's residence in the Rue d'Assas, a place easy of access. Noridet began stealthily watching her and waited for his chance.

As for his enforced connection with the Brossin family, he kept it up to a moderate extent, that is to say, just enough not to discourage the baron's hopes of his marrying Henriette, who since the adventure in the cave near Biville knew not whether to love or hate him.

When Noridet heard of the departure of the Mornacs for Switzerland, he thought that a chance for harming Andrée would now offer, and he started for Schaffhausen under an assumed name. We know that his attempt failed, thanks to Pierre Lefort, and that once again he found himself face to face to Alcamo. However, he was not displeased with the result of the last night he spent in Switzerland, for the count and the recluse had evidently perished in the fire of Fritz's hut. On returning to Paris, Noridet was now mainly anxious to discover Louise and Fortoto, for he ever had the fatal casket before his eyes. He had not beheld it since the day when Louise's lover had snatched it from him, just as the over-confiding girl had been about to intrust it to his care; and the recollection of the scene that had ensued reminded him of his foster-mother, Aurora. He had prudently abstained from visiting her house as long as he believed himself watched from near or far by Count d'Alcamo. But circumstances had now changed, and after prolonged reflection he resolved to consult Aurora. "It is impossible," he thought, "that she can have remained all this time without some news of Fortoto, and I know how to make her talk."

Acting on this idea, Noridet left his rooms on the morrow of the Long-champs races and proceeded to Aurora's abode. He remembered that had he

learnt nothing from her at their last interview, but this time he determined to intimidate her if necessary. "After all," said he, between his teeth, "it was she who gave me the poison, and her life is in as much danger as mine." When he came in sight of the sorceress's house he saw that the raven was not at its post on the window sill; and this bird serving usually as a signal between him and Aurora, there was reason to believe that the old negress was engaged with some "outsider." However, Noridet had not come so far to retreat, and he boldly entered the passage, climbed the stairs and rang at his foster-mother's door.

"Ah! there you are at last, my Jules!" cried Aurora, as she answered the summons, rolling up the whites of her eyes, which, with her, was an expression of intense affection. And thereupon she opened her arms to embrace Noridet, but he recoiled, and sharply exclaimed: "Let me come in, I have no time for hugging."

"Yes, come in, my dear boy, come in!" she answered, "we can talk better inside."

She stood aside to admit her nursling, and then closed the door carefully behind him.

"Come here! Ghorab, come here!" she called to the raven which was hopping joyously around Noridet, as though to welcome him.

The room had not changed in appearance. The dusty vials were still set in rows upon their stands; the cards were still spread out in their usual place, and Aurora resumed her majestic attitude on her old red arm-chair, a huge pair of spectacles with round glasses lying on the table on one side of her, and a check handkerchief, soiled with snuff, on the other. Noridet threw himself down upon a wolf-skin which was spread over an apology for a sofa. "Where is Fortoto?" he asked, in an imperious tone.

The negress was about to reply, when a piercing shriek resounded in an adjoining room. Noridet sprang to his feet. "What is going on here?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing," rejoined the sorceress; "but you know that I possess secret means of curing certain illnesses."

"So it's a patient you have in the next room?"

"Yes, a woman; but don't be disturbed, there's a nurse with her."

"Hum! she must be suffering badly to shriek like that, but no matter; where is Fortoto?"

"I don't know. It is more than six months since I saw him. Why do you ask?"

"Because he has betrayed me. Your son is a rascal, and has sold me to my enemies."

"That can't be," said Aurora, shaking her head, "he hasn't sold you, but that worthless woman has bewitched him."

"What do you know about it? I tell you that he has revealed my secret to people who will have both you and me sent to the guillotine. That's what your son has done."

Aurora smiled, displaying her white teeth, and began to sway about in her chair. With her deep wrinkles and bristling hair she looked like some monstrous African idol.

"Ah, you laugh!" exclaimed Noridet, rising; "you laugh because you don't understand me, but listen to this. We are not in Madagascar, and those who make the poison as well as those who use it are sent straight to the guillotine in this country."

"No," said Aurora, firmly, "neither of us will die by steel. It is written—"

"There you go with your witch's nonsense!" exclaimed Noridet. "Answer me when I question you, and obey me when I command, but spare me your nonsense."

"Question and command, then," said Aurora, still very quietly.

"Well, I told you six months ago that a man was master of my life; I told you that this man knew all about me from my youth upward, that he must have lived on the island of Mauritius, and I asked you to tell me his real name. You do not know it, or will not tell me. However, I must know his name at once, and I give you twenty-four hours to find it out."

"He must be very powerful, since you fear him so much," muttered the nurse.

"I don't fear him, now I have killed him," said Noridet, in a stifled tone. Aurora looked at her foster-son with an expression of surprise and admiration. "Yes, I have killed him," resumed Jules, violently, "but the secret which he discovered has not died with him. It is written in the papers which Fortoto has stolen."

"Stolen! Who told him to steal them?"

"Who told him? Why, the girl with whom he is in love is the daughter of a man who was my enemy's tool."

"I told you that she had bewitched him."

"That may be, but she won't profit by the theft. Among these papers there is one which disinherits me and gives a large part of my uncle's fortune to a miserable pauper, that Andrée whom the Mathis family picked up on the isle of Bourbon."

"Andrée!" repeated Aurora, for the first time seeming to be startled.

"Do you mean the girl who was called Andrée Salazie in Mauritius?"

"Yes, and at this moment my life and fortune are at the mercy of a mulatto and a beggar girl whom it suited my family to bring up out of charity."

"It cannot be! I am mistaken," muttered Aurora, talking to herself and as though following some idea which had suddenly arisen in her mind.

"Do you see, now, why I must know what ties can have united the enemy I have slain to the enemies who still live?"

"Tell me again what you told me once about the man who possessed your secret," said the fortune-teller, thoughtfully.

"He is fifty years of age, tall, dark, with grey eyes and black eyebrows."

There was a pause, during which Noridet showed various signs of impatience. "Come here, Ghorab!" suddenly called the sorceress, striking the arm of her chair with her bony fingers.

At this signal the raven opened its wings and flew to the table. "Are you going to begin your jugglery again?" exclaimed Noridet, in exasperation.

"You came to consult me because you wish to know what I can tell," said Aurora, assuming an imperious tone in her turn, "let me do as I please, or you will learn nothing."

Jules shrugged his shoulders and sulkily threw himself back on the sofa while the sibyl with an air of great gravity began a singular performance. She took a maize cob from a bag hanging against the wall, and spread the cards before her. When the pack was carefully arranged upon the table she began to remove the grains of maize from the cob, and placed three of them upon each card. The raven followed all this with more attentive eyes than Noridet. It ruffled its feathers, croaking hoarsely, but it did not come forward.

"*Akoul, Ghorab!*" said the sorceress in a husky voice; and immediately

the bird, which seemed to understand this guttural language, began stalking slowly before the rows of spotted cards, picking here and there a grain of maize. It performed this three times over, at each turn choosing the cards from which it wished to pick the grains, and disdaining the other ones. "*Barka!*" said the sorceress, at the end of the third round.

The raven at once stopped, and, like an actor retiring to the slips after playing his part, it flew on to the floor and hid behind its mistress's chair. Noridet had begun to stamp angrily, but Aurora paid very little attention to her foster-son. She was solely occupied with the grains of maize which the raven had left untouched. "It is he," she muttered, "it is he, indeed; and yet, he was lost with his ship down there, on the coast of Tamatava!"

She counted the cards several times, and finally repeated: "Yes, yes, it is he! it is he!"

"Will you ever finish, you old witch?" shouted Noridet, whose patience was exhausted.

"He is alive! alive!" rejoined the negress, in the tone of a prophetess.

"You see that your cards tell us nothing worth hearing, as I have just killed him," grumbled Noridet, shrugging his shoulders.

"Ghorab is never mistaken. The man who owned the house overlooking the Bay of the Falls is not dead."

"Enough! tell me something about this Andrée."

"I only saw her when she was a little girl, but I should know her again," muttered Aurora.

"I don't care whether you would know her or not. What I want to find out is why this man Aleamo was interested in her."

"Where does Andrée Salazie live?" asked Aurora, instead of replying.

"In the Rue d'Assas, number 99, with Monsieur Mornac, and Madame de Mathis is there also. Madame de Mathis will also be heiress in my place, if this will be brought forward. But these people are all in Switzerland just now."

"You are mistaken, my Jules. Andrée Salazie is in Paris."

"I see that you are decidedly crazy, and I must be the same myself to think that I could learn anything from your cracked head," replied Noridet, contemptuously.

"No," cried the pythoness, rising to her full height, "I am not crazy, I am powerful. Your enemy has surprised your secret, but I know his, and I shall know how to make use of it."

"Come, now! foster-mother, tell me more clearly what you mean," said Noridet, softening.

Aurora spoke with an air of inspiration. "Sleep peacefully, my son," said she emphatically; "to-morrow I will tell you the hiding-place of those papers which you fear, and in a few days I will force the man who holds them to give them up to you."

Noridet was stupefied, and wondered if this prophecy were true or not. But at that moment the interview was again interrupted by the door of an inner room opening, and a ragged old woman appearing on the threshold, shouting, "Come quick, she's dying!"

The negress turned angrily towards the new comer. "All right," she said. "Be off, I'm coming!"

"Some more of your quack doctor's business, I see," said Noridet, and he now took up his hat and turned towards the door.

"I will come to see you at your rooms," remarked Aurora.

"Don't venture to do that! I should have you put out," exclaimed

Jules, angrily. He was already on the landing when the sorceress called after him. "Soon ! soon ! I will bring you some news of the man of the Bay of the Falls, for to-morrow I shall go to see Andrée Salazie."

"Go to the devil if you like !" growled Noridet, rushing down stairs, four steps at a time. He felt certain that some piece of infamy was being perpetrated in Aurora's rooms and he was anxious to be off. The neighbourhood was almost deserted. Except a few good citizens, who had brought their wives there to look at the Saint-Denis plain, and two or three prowlers from the *barrière* who were lying down in the sunshine, Noridet met no one in crossing the plateau. He took the shortest way down into Paris, sprung into a cab which he met on the outer boulevard, and was driven home.

He was in reality disturbed by the reticence of Aurora, who evidently knew something about Count d'Alcamo, notably the secret of his position as concerned Andrée. Still he did not expect a visit from the sorceress, as he was sure that she would not find Andrée at the Rue d'Assas, he having left the Mornaes and their friends at Schaffhausen. Moreover, he did not believe in all Aurora's jugglery, but he was not positively sure that Alcamo was dead, and asked himself in alarm if the count had again escaped destruction. "Bah !" said he, just as his cab turned into the Rue du Helder, "matters are not the same on the banks of the Rhine as on the cliffs of Mouville, and, now that I have only to deal with that wretched Fortoto and that fool of an Andrée, I shall be able to settle everything."

With this conclusion he alighted and hastened to his rooms, where his man-servant told him, to his great surprise, that M. Alfred Brossin had been waiting for him for nearly an hour. The baron's heir was not, as a rule, entertaining society to Noridet, and on this occasion his visit greatly annoyed him. In the first place he wished to be alone, and in the second he feared some invitation from the Brossin family. Having made up his mind, since his return from Switzerland, to break off his connection with the financier's family, he was vexed with his servant who had not got rid of the visitor, and decided to receive young Alfred in such a way as would deprive him of all desire to call again. He went resolutely into the room where M. Brossin had been waiting, and where he was now walking up and down slashing the air with his little walking-stick. This precipitate motion evinced agitation of mind, and Noridet was startled by the change in the dandy's face. He was three times as ghastly as usual, his eyes were red as if he had been shedding tears ; and, a symptom of still greater gravity, his collar was creased and his tie awry.

"Good morning, Monsieur Brossin, how do you do ?" said Noridet, somewhat stiffly.

"Not well at all, my dear Jules, not at all," sighed Alfred, offering his hand which Jules shook, without any cordiality, however.

"You look tired. I suppose that you have had a stormy night."

"It was not the night, it was the day—yesterday—that proved a bad one. I had a bet on Vermilion," added young Brossin mournfully.

"And lost it? That was bad, but I don't suppose that you took the trouble of calling here merely to tell me that piece of bad news?"

"No—certainly not—although—Vermilion is the cause—the cause of—"

"Of what?"

The unhappy Alfred stammered out a few words which were utterly unintelligible, and then suddenly making up his mind, he added in a pathetic tone: "My dear friend, I have a service to ask of you—two, in fact,"

"What are they?" said Noridet, more and more coldly.

"I have lost thirty-five thousand francs, and I must pay them in twenty-four hours. I came to ask you if you could lend me the money." He spoke all this with the utmost rapidity, so as to leave himself no time for hesitation.

"I am very sorry," replied Noridet, very drily, and taking good care not to lose so excellent an opportunity for breaking off all connection with his tiresome friend, "grieved, really, at not being able to accommodate you, but I have just paid some very heavy legacy duty, and I haven't any money by me."

Alfred let himself fall upon a divan and made a series of despairing gestures. The step which he had just taken had been the result of long meditation. He had spent the night in asking himself how he should meet the terrible payment, and had at last settled upon this ingenious idea. Noridet could not divine that he had forged his signature, and the dandy thought it would be very clever to borrow the money of him to pay the note.

"How is it that you don't apply to Baron Brossin?" asked Noridet, enjoying Alfred's sufferings. "When a man has a millionaire for a father he can't be afraid to confess to a debt of sixteen hundred louis."

"Ah yes! talk about my father!" exclaimed Alfred, lifting his hands to heaven. "I don't know what is the matter with him ever since yesterday morning, but I would rather throw myself into the Seine at once than ask him for a hundred louis even. He has shut himself up with his cashier, that bear of a Bouscareau, all the morning, and no one dare go near him."

"What is the other service which you wished to ask me?"

"Oh, no matter! I did mean to ask you to be my second, but I give that up."

"It is true that people in mourning don't usually go out as seconds," said Noridet, smiling, "so I couldn't very well serve you in that way. May I be allowed to ask you the name of your antagonist?"

"My antagonist, why he is a negro!"

"A negro."

"Well, a mulatto—and his name is Fortoto."

"Fortoto! did you say Fortoto?"

"Yes, and you can imagine that I hardly care to fight with a man of that class or with those who take his part."

"But you must fight, I tell you!" exclaimed Noridet, seizing Alfred's arm with a violence which astonished the baron's heir. "I will be your second, do you hear?"

"But you refused just now," said Alfred, gazing at him in stupid astonishment.

"That is true, but I did not reflect, and really I can't leave a friend in trouble."

"Thank you," muttered young Brossin, dejectedly, "but it would do no good."

"Why? Didn't you rely upon me just now?"

"Yes," said Alfred, curtly.

"Well then, do you no longer consider me able to assist you? I thought that I had some little experience in affairs of this sort."

"Oh! it isn't that. On the contrary, it would be a feather in my cap. The club would think better of me if I had a man like you for my second."

"Explain yourself, then, my dear Alfred," said Noridet, who had completely changed his manner since hearing Fortoto's name pronounced.

The baron's heir did not make haste to reply. He chewed the top of his cane, and gazed at the carpet. At last, however, he resolved to make a painful avowal. "I may as well tell you," said he, jumping up as if worked by a spring, "that it wouldn't amuse me very much to fight, still I should have gone out all the same, you know, so that the people might not make fun of me at the Gnat Club, but now—"

"Why not now?"

"Well, now, I cannot return to the club, because I can't pay my bet. So, you see, I don't see why I should go out and risk my life for the pleasure—"

"The honour, you mean," said Noridet, coldly.

"The honour! the honour! Honour doesn't count for much on 'Change. I'd rather have thirty-five bank-notes of a thousand francs each."

M. de Mathis's thrice guilty nephew had certainly no scruples, but he respected the ideas of the society in which he lived, and this cynical cowardice seemed revolting to him. However, since he had heard Forto's name, he wished very much to make young Brossin talk, and he determined to lead him on.

"Come, my dear fellow," said he, in an insinuating tone, "tell me all about the matter."

"Oh, it is very simple," sighed the dandy. "I was taking some refreshment at the races with Vergoncey. I tried to joke a little with a grisette, but she put on airs, and thereupon this Fortoto came up and took the part of a knight protector to this princess in muslin."

"But it surely isn't with him that you intend to fight?"

"I have just told you that I am not going to fight at all; but, unfortunately, there is a real gentleman in the matter, a fellow who intervened and defended this pretty pair."

"What is the name of this Don Quixote?"

"His name is Monville, and he is said to be very rich—a hundred thousand francs a year, I believe. So you see 'tis a very serious matter."

"Monsieur de Monville; but 'Monville' is the name of your father's estate?"

"Yes, and my governor is very much annoyed at it, for I believe he thought of calling himself 'Brossin de Monville' one of these days."

"And you say that this Monville knows this mulatto, Fortoto?" asked Noridet, visibly interested in this strange coincidence.

"He knows him very well. He must employ him as a steward, or something of that sort, or else he is in love with the girl himself."

Noridet reflected for two or three minutes. He rejoiced in the chance which had so unexpectedly placed him upon Fortoto's track, but he had no idea of any link that could bind his foster-brother to a rich gentleman. He had utterly forgotten when and where he had heard the name of Monville before. "Do you know Monsieur de Monville's address?" he asked, absently.

"Of course I do. He took care to write to me this morning, asking me to let him know who my seconds were, and he did not omit giving his address; so that I have no excuse for not replying, although he stays in a queer neighbourhood."

"What neighbourhood is it?"

"The Boulevard d'Italie; do not confound it with the Boulevard des Italiens."

"Isn't it near the Barrière de Fontainebleau?"

"Exactly."

"It is certainly strange that a rich man should live thereabouts."

"Oh, it seems that he has bought a palace of a place, with a park and all that sort of thing."

"How old is he?" asked Noridet, who was thinking of Alcamo.

"Twenty-two, or five, I don't know precisely; but what I do know is that he would run me through like a lark on a kitchen-spit."

Noridet drew a long breath. He no longer feared that this Monville was his formidable enemy, the count, under another name; still, on the other hand, he was fully resolved to find out what connection existed between this individual and Fortoto. "My dear Alfred," said he, gravely, "you cannot get out of fighting."

"The deuce I cannot! You talk about it as if it were the merest joke! In the first place, there were no blows exchanged. This gentleman merely said some unpleasant things to me, that was all!"

"It was quite enough, and I declare to you that I cannot allow one of my friends, for you are one of my friends, to disgrace himself by refusing to fight. I think, indeed, that I should rather take the matter on my own shoulders."

"I shouldn't prevent you," exclaimed Alfred, eagerly.

"Unfortunately, it wouldn't be regular; but if you will entrust your interests to me, I promise you that I will arrange matters so that you shall have the best of it."

In spite of this tempting proposition, young Brossin displayed no haste in replying. His brain did not hold many ideas, but it began working on the strength of Noridet's change of tone. Jules's persistence in wishing to be his second after his first curt refusal seemed very strange to Alfred, who came to the conclusion that his fashionable friend had some interest in mixing himself up in the matter. "Good blood always shows itself," and the banker's son had cunning enough to try to turn this interest to account. "It would certainly be a great honour to me," said he, scratching his forehead, "but how can I fight with Monsieur de Monville before I pay him?"

"Do you owe him any money then?"

"Of course I do! He took up my bet on Vermilion, and I must begin by giving him thirty-five thousand francs. That is a high price for the pleasure of being run through the body."

Of course this was an absolute falsehood, as Alfred only owed sixty louis to M. de Monville; however, he did not care for that. The stroke was a good one, and better than he had thought, for Noridet was anxious not to lose the chance of talking to the man who knew Fortoto's whereabouts. He would even willingly have crossed swords with him himself, and he did not mind paying a few thousand francs for the discovery he had made, so important did he consider it. He had, however, such utter contempt for M. Brossin's heir, that he would have preferred sparing his purse whilst serving him as second.

"You have just given me a very good reason for hesitating, my dear Alfred," he said, "and I am sufficiently your friend to help you under these circumstances."

"What! would you consent to give me—to lend me, I mean, the thirty-five thousand francs?" cried Alfred, flushing with hope and pleasure.

"With all my heart; but I haven't got them here, and I must have time to raise the money. However, there is a way to arrange everything."

"What is that?"



"You must write to Monsieur de Monville saying that you place the matter in my hands. I will go to see him this very day, and I will tell him that I am security for your bet, and if he is a gentleman, as I believe, he won't refuse to give you satisfaction."

This adroit plan would have fully suited Noridet, who only wished to find a pretext for visiting M. de Monville. He might thus hope to get out of the matter without disbursing a franc; however, his proposal did not succeed, for Alfred had good reasons for not accepting it.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, "that would not suit me at all. I am not so very desirous of fighting this gentleman, if I cannot pay him to-day." This confession made Noridet make a grimace of disgust, and young Brossin saw that he had gone too far. "Besides," said he, "how should I look in this millionaire's eyes, if he saw that I had to get some one to pay and stand security for me? You know, my dear Jules, that this would not be the correct thing at all."

Jules knew it perfectly well, but he cared precious little about his friend's reputation, and he was now thinking of some new arrangement. He could not devise one, however, and after a little reflection he realised that he must hand over the money.

"After all," thought he, "Brossin's father will pay me back one of these days, and I should be crazy to miss this chance of getting introduced to Monsieur de Monville, through whom I shall certainly find Fortoto."

Alfred had again begun walking up and down the room, and alternate hope and fear lent his face all the colours of the rainbow. "Now that I think of it," said Noridet, "it seems to me that I have some money at hand with which I meant to pay my upholsterer. I can put him off for a few days. When do you think that you can really return me the money?"

"In a month or even three weeks," sputtered out young Brossin. Delight almost upset him, and he did not know what he was saying, for he had not the least prospect of receiving any money with which he might refund the loan.

"Well, write a letter to introduce me to Monsieur de Monville," said Noridet, pointing to an elegant desk. And at the same time, he went towards a little buhl cabinet which stood in one corner of the room, opened it, and Alfred, who was watching him stealthily, saw him draw from a portfolio a packet of bank-notes.

"I will give you a receipt," said young Brossin, breathing as loudly as a drowning man when rising to the surface of the water.

"In a moment. Write the letter first."

Alfred immediately began to compose his missive. But he had not a fertile imagination, and he was still trying to think how he should begin when the door of the smoking-room opened and Noridet's valet appeared. "There is a man here who wishes to see you, sir," said the valet.

"A man! What man?" asked Noridet, in a surly tone.

"A man who has come to collect payment for a note of hand."

"You must be crazy. I do not owe any money on notes of hand. Turn the fellow out."

Alfred, who had been listening, felt as though he were about to swoon.

"It is for thirty-five thousand francs, to the order of Monsieur Ménager, and it is indorsed by Monsieur Jules Noridet," called out a voice from the next room.

"Ah! this is too much!" said the master of the house, striding towards the door with the intention of turning out the intruder who indulged in

such impertinent persistence. But he was prevented by young Brossin who, to his utter amazement, darted like a stag into the ante-room. For young Brossin to take flight without waiting for the bank-notes which he so greatly desired to possess, there must be some very serious reasons, but Noridet would have been glad to get rid of him without handing him the money had the letter to M. de Monville only been written. However, young Alfred had been in such a hurry that he had thrown down his pen, the one word "Sir" being all that he had written. He had made but one plunge from the smoking-room into the ante-chamber, and when Noridet went to look for him he only found the fellow who had caused the disturbance. Jules was in a very bad humour for many reasons, so he spoke very sharply to the intruder. "What have you come here for?" said he, looking at him from head to foot.

The fellow's appearance was, it must be admitted, anything but attractive. He was a little old man in a shabby black coat, a yellow waistcoat, covered with spots of grease, and a pair of trousers with frayed edges. This outfit was completed by a pair of patched boots, and a hat from which a chemist might have extracted grease enough to feed two or three lanterns. The owner of this disgusting head-piece held it respectfully in his hand, but, amid the luxurious hangings of the ante-room, his presence had the same effect as a spot of mud on a Smyrna carpet. "I presume that I have the honour of speaking to Monsieur Jules Noridet," said he, without in the least losing countenance. His expression was a combination of humility and impudence such as usually distinguishes the face of a lawyer's clerk.

"That is my name. What do you want with me?" said Noridet, roughly.

"I am the bearer, sir, of four little notes of hand, in all thirty-five thousand francs, which are due to-day, and I have called here for the amount."

"What absurd joke is all this?"

"Ah! sir, I don't venture to joke when attending to business. I am the third clerk of Monsieur Pigoche, huissier, and I have come—"

"You are mistaken, or else you are mad. I don't sign notes of hand, and for that reason I have nothing to do with huissiers."

"The signer not having paid this morning on presentation," quietly resumed the old man, "my employer gave me orders to call on the indorser before protesting."

"And what has all this gibberish to do with me, I beg?"

"Sir, I had the honour to tell your servant that your name is affixed to all four of the bills."

Noridet frowned. His anger has become mistrust, and he began to realise that there was some mystery in the matter which it was important for him to clear up.

"Leave the room," said he to the servant, who was pretending to dust the chairs in order not to lose a word of this interesting colloquy.

"Have you the notes with you?" asked Noridet, when he was alone with the clerk.

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied the possessor of the greasy hat, taking a well-worn note-case from his pocket. "I beg of you to believe that I should not have taken the liberty to call here had I not—"

"Make haste; I have no time to lose."

"Here, sir; here they are."

The clerk then exhibited the strips of stamped paper, and unfolded them

before Noridet, who at once exclaimed : " But that is Monsieur Brossin's signature."

" Yes, sir, certainly ; but your name is on the back," said the man of the law, promptly turning the notes over.

Noridet stared in amazement as on each paper he saw his own name very neatly traced, with the flourish which he had the habit of making below it. He made a gesture as if to seize hold of the notes ; but the clerk drew back with every show of respect, and without letting go of the precious autographs he contented himself with holding the notes in both hands while Noridet examined them at his ease.

" I never indorsed these notes," said he, with a disdainful gesture.

" This is serious, very serious ! " said the old man.

" I don't care how serious it is, I tell you that I never signed them."

" Then it is a case of forgery," said the bailiff's clerk, quietly replacing the notes in his pocket-book.

" I don't say that it isn't."

" And I know what we have to do now. This case isn't the first one."

" Which means—"

" That we shall go to the Imperial Prosecutor."

" Go to him if you like ; I do not hinder you."

" I should be obliged to you, sir, if you would give me a written declaration that you did not indorse these notes."

" I shall give you nothing whatever," replied Noridet, firmly.

" Very well, sir. We shall wait till to-morrow at noon ; then we shall protest the notes, and I think that Monsieur Ménager will at once enter a complaint at the public prosecutor's office."

" Monsieur Ménager, did you say ? Who is Monsieur Ménager ? " said Noridet, struck by a sudden remembrance.

" Monsieur Ménager is the discounteer to whom the notes were handed. He lives in the Rue Vanneau, and if you would like to see him, he is always there from two to four in the afternoon."

Noridet had some difficulty in concealing his surprise. He now began to understand the situation, for he remembered the propositions made to him by young Brossin in November. " The scamp forged the signature which I refused to give him," thought he. " It is a good thing to know this."

But although he had made up his mind as to Alfred's guilt, he knew nothing as to the leuder of the money, and the mysteries of the house in the Rue Vanneau returned to his mind. Before doing anything, he resolved to be prudent. " You will keep the notes till to-morrow," said he, in a milder tone.

" Yes, sir, unless Monsieur Ménager should be unwilling to wait to complain of the forgery."

" He is in Paris, then ? "

" I think so, sir ; for it was by his express orders that my employer sent me here to-day. Usually, we only go to the indorser after the protest."

" Where does your employer live ? "

" At No. 115, Rue des Tournelles."

" Very well. Tell him that I will call at his office to-morrow morning."

" As you please, sir," said the clerk, bowing. And he left the room with the stiff and deliberate step of one of those wooden figures which walk out of a German clock when it strikes twelve.

Noridet was glad to be rid of his unpleasant visitor, and quickly returned to his smoking-room to reflect upon the scene and its meaning. Chance

had brought him two precious indications ; but how could he unravel the tangled skein of complications ? He began by grumbling at the disappearance of the little fool who had fled before writing the letter to M. de Monville. "All this would have cost me thirty-five thousand francs," muttered Noridet, "but at least I should have known what to think about this fellow who has sprouted up as suddenly as a mushroom in the world of fashion. Monville ! who can he be, and why does he take sides with that rascally Fortoto ? It is true that I hold that good-for-nothing Alfred, and I can do what I like with him now, by threatening to prosecute him. But where shall I find him ? He is quite capable of throwing himself into the Seine." This supposition was hardly admissible, however, to those who knew the dandy's character, and Noridet immediately added : "Bah ! he is too great a coward to kill himself, and I am sure that he must have gone to hide, perhaps at his father's house, unless, indeed, he has gone to weep on the breast of that fool Vergoncey."

However, Noridet's ideas soon turned to a more interesting subject than young Brossin, who, after all, could not tell him much of what he wished to find out. To reach Fortoto through his protector, M. de Monville, such was the programme of the new campaign which Jules now had to undertake. Alfred had told him but little, yet what he had said would surely answer some purpose. "Millionaires cannot be very numerous on the Boulevard d'Italie," thought Noridet, "and, by inquiring in the neighbourhood, I should be very stupid if I didn't discover the residence of this knight-errant."

The more he thought of this, the better the plan appeared to him, and as he was a man of decision, he resolved to start at once. The afternoon was passing away, and the propitious moment approaching, for night was the best time for reconnoitering, as Noridet well knew. So he dressed at once, told his servant that he should dine out, and went off with the determination of finding out what he wished to learn, even if he had to introduce himself into M. de Monville's house on some pretence or other. He took the precaution to place a pair of small revolvers in his overcoat pockets, together with a tapering dagger secreted near his pocket-book. With these weapons about him, and fifty louis in his waistcoat, he felt prepared for any such emergencies as might present themselves. He took a cab to the Fontainebleau gate of Paris, and then began to walk along the Boulevard d'Italie. Night had already fallen, but after going some distance, he descried at the foot of a slope a wall of moderate height behind which there were several old trees. There was a park or garden beyond.

"This must be the place," he thought, hurrying on.

The garden was at the corner of the boulevard and a cross road. The brick wall enclosing it seemed to have been recently built ; and facing the boulevard, there was a handsomely wrought iron gate. The trees in the grounds, however, were so dense that they almost entirely hid the house from the gaze of curious passers-by. Cypressess, larches, and cedars grew thickly together forming a miniature forest, above which the slate roof and ornamental weather-vanes of the aristocratic habitation were scarcely visible. The dark green trees so singularly chosen almost gave the grounds a funereal aspect, and Noridet could not understand why such a rich and elegant young man as this Monville was said to be, should voluntarily cloister himself in such a gloomy place. He even thought that he might be mistaken as to this being his abode. However, he felt the gate, and finding that the bars were already rusty, and that the lock on the inside

did not appear to have been recently used, for a clematis had grown across the ironwork inside, he came to the conclusion that there must be another entrance to the property, and this he began to seek. He turned the corner and followed the side street, which the enclosure bordered for a considerable distance. This street was still more lonely than the boulevard, and it was merely lighted by a single lamp. After going a hundred yards or so, Noridet found himself before a low door, which must be often used, it seemed, for its brass handle and ornamental work were brightly polished; however, it opened by some unseen internal means, for no keyhole or lock was visible. As it seemed improbable that there was any other door or gate facing the tanneries, and miserable shanties which overlooked the Bièvre round the further corner of the wall, Noridet decided not to go any further.

He returned towards the boulevard musing, and bent upon finding some place where he might obtain some information. People must gossip about a rich young fellow like M. de Monville, and perhaps he, Noridet, might find some loquacious cit in a neighbouring café. The rain was now threatening, and a high wind swept along the boulevard just as Noridet espied a kind of tavern bearing the sign: "The Friend's Meeting-place—Coffee, Wines, Billiards."

Setting his face against the windows he saw, through a thick cloud of tobacco smoke, that there was a large room inside and several individuals seated at marble tables. He hesitated about entering such an inferior kind of place as this appeared to be, but the weather gave him an excellent excuse for doing so, as the rain suddenly began to fall in torrents. He thereupon hastily entered, and found himself in presence of a little woman, still fresh, though middle-aged, and with a very animated face. At the first glance Noridet guessed that this queen of the counter was talkative, and he inwardly rejoiced at the happy choice he had made. "What weather!" said he, taking out his handkerchief to wipe his face. "The storm caught me at the top of the slope, and I thought that I should be drowned before I got down here."

"The fact is that it is a bad night," said the landlady, mincingly; "but you can dry yourself here, sir, for a while. The storm will pass over to Charenton, as it always does, and in three-quarters of an hour it will be quite clear again."

"Well," said Noridet, "I'm glad of shelter, for I should have to go a long distance to find a cab."

At the same time he inspected the place, and saw that it was only occupied by half a dozen customers absorbed in playing cards.

"The omnibus of the Maison Blanche is not far off," resumed the landlady; "but perhaps you don't care to take the omnibus, sir?"

"Oh, yes, I do, when I'm obliged; but I am not in any hurry. I came to this neighbourhood to see some one who was not at home, and I—"

"I'll venture to say that you went to call on Monsieur de Monville."

"Do you know him?" exclaimed Noridet, with more eagerness than was altogether prudent.

"Of course I do," said the landlady, and then she modestly added: "I mean that I have often seen him go by in his tilbury. Of course, he is altogether too stylish to find any pleasure in this neighbourhood, although, without boasting, I certainly have a fine class of customers; but when the weather is fine we shall have tables outside, and he may look in some day and order a glass of beer. I have some capital beer if you will take any, sir."

"With pleasure," replied Noridet, who only desired to prolong his stay, and above all, his conversation: "I should also like something to eat if it is obtainable, for I haven't dined."

"Not dined? and it is so late!"

"Ah! it is Monsieur de Monville's fault."

"He invited you and then forgot about it, no doubt?" exclaimed the woman. "Oh, those fops, they're all like that!"

"It isn't that exactly," said Noridet, leaning his elbows on the counter. "But I once knew a young man of the same name as his, who went to Mexico three years ago. One of my friends told me yesterday that a gentleman calling himself Monsieur de Monville had come to live in a very handsome house on the Boulevard d'Italie, so I set out, rather late, to be sure, to try and find him, and I reached the Barrière de Fontainebleau thinking that I could easily get his exact address there. Now, would you believe it, no one could give it to me?"

"Oh, that isn't so surprising, for it isn't easy to get into the house, although it may be easy enough to see it."

"Is it really that place, at the end of that large garden with a gate?"

"Yes, at the corner of the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette. That is the place, but I'm sure that you could not find the proper entrance."

"No; I walked all along the wall without being able to find any bell; I wanted to question the neighbours, but all the houses were closed."

"Oh yes, everybody round about shuts up at nightfall."

"The end of it was that I lost my time."

"You might have looked for the entrance until to-morrow without finding it. It is a quarter of a league from here, in a little blind alley, and you would never believe it, but the fact is, this millionaire has to cross the courtyard of a cow-keeper to get in and out."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Noridet, putting on an expression of utter amazement.

"It is as I tell you, my dear sir," said the little woman, who was beginning to feel quite at home with him.

The elegant Jules knew by experience that contradiction is the best way to make some people talk; so he now resorted to this means and exclaimed: "I can't believe that a man who has horses and a carriage of his own can live behind a stable."

"Well, Monsieur de Monville is not like anybody else; in the first place he is very eccentric, and, besides, he perhaps has some good reasons for shutting himself up like that."

"Dear me, does he make counterfeit money?"

"Oh, I don't mean that; but when a fellow is two-and-twenty, rich and handsome, he sometimes has treasures to hide," said the woman with an emphasis that struck Noridet.

"What! can he be jealously hiding some princess whom he has carried off from her family?"

"I don't know whether she is a princess or not, but there's no denying that she is pretty," replied the landlady with a prudish look.

"Well, I begin to think that this gentleman isn't the Monville whom I once knew," said Noridet, "and I think that I might as well give up my search."

This remark had no other aim than to lead the gossipy landlady on a little further, and it did not fail to take effect. "Now I think of it," she

said all at once, "you would perhaps like a slice of ham with your beer before you go!"

"The truth is," said Noridet, hesitatingly, "that the rain keeps on, and I shall be as wet as a duck; still I am afraid of staying late in this part of the town, and—"

"Oh, if that is all, sir, my husband will be home soon, and he will go and fetch a cab for you; but, meantime, if you will sit down at this table here, I shall be able to attend to you without leaving my counter."

This proposal was quite to Noridet's taste, as he wished to obtain further information from the woman. "That will suit me exactly," said he in a lively tone, "for I am always hungry when I take exercise, and I actually feel faint; but I hope, my dear madame, that we shall keep up our little chat, for I don't like to dine without talking."

"You will see how well we will manage it," said the little woman, coming down from her perch behind the counter; and thereupon she pointed out to Noridet a kind of niche with a glass screen, which adjoined the counter, and held a table and a chair. "That is where I seat my favourite customers," continued she, chatting away while she laid the cloth and brought a knife and fork; "that is to say the respectable people, for you see, in this part of Paris we are obliged to receive all sorts of folks."

"These gentlemen appear to be everything that is desirable," gravely said Noridet, looking at the card-players at the end of the room.

"Oh, those gentlemen are trades-people near by, and they will soon go home to bed, but sometimes workmen who have been drinking come in, so you will be quieter in this little corner."

Noridet made no further objection, and began tackling the stale ham which his hostess had served him. He had been installed in the niche without being remarked by any of the card-players, and from his corner he could, by leaning forward a trifle, see everything that went on in the establishment. It boasted of a billiard-table, as was set forth on the sign, and there were some gray marble tables all round distinguishing it from the rough and ready taverns in the neighbourhood. Noridet congratulated himself more and more on his choice, and took care not to let the conversation drop. "This ham is excellent, my dear madame," said he, "and I never met with better beer"—here he was obliged to conceal a grimace of disgust. "If Monsieur de Monville does not come here to taste it, it merely shows that he is a simpleton."

"Oh, there's no time lost, as he has only been a month in the neighbourhood," answered the landlady, who had taken her seat at the counter again.

"Before he came to this place was there any one staying there?"

"No, sir; indeed no one could live there. Builders had been working at it since the beginning of the winter, and they had a fine job of it, I can tell you. Everything was falling to pieces, and any one could walk right into the place, for it was as open as an old mill. So they had to build a new wall round the garden. But it seems that it is magnificent now, inside. Whole cartloads of furniture gilded all over were taken in."

"Monville does not live there alone, then? I begin to think that you are right in saying that he has a lady-love shut up with him."

"Alone? Oh no! There is the young lady I spoke of, and who hardly goes out; I have not seen her more than two or three times. Then there is a gentleman who might be her father or the young man's father, judging by his age."

"You don't mean to tell me that the people in the neighbourhood don't know yet whether he is his father or not?" laughed Noridet.

"Well, I must tell you that they have no visitors whatever."

"But they have some servants surely, and servants don't usually keep their tongues in their pockets."

"Their servants are as mute as fish. Three tall fellows, as tall and as stiff as drum-majors, and a fat cook who never opens her lips except when she goes marketing."

"The deuce she doesn't! Well, this is quite uncommon, and I now see why nobody knows anything about these people."

"Still the folks around know something of how they live. For on the day before yesterday the butcher told me that there were several persons in the house, or else they wouldn't buy such an amount of meat."

"Some of Monsieur de Monville's relations, most likely," said Noridet, with the careless air which he had assumed from the beginning of the dialogue.

He had learnt that M. de Monville surrounded himself with a certain amount of mystery. There was nothing to show who or what he really was, and Noridet was beginning to think that he would probably learn no more, when the woman exclaimed, "Ah! I forgot to tell you that there is a negro in the place."

"A negro," exclaimed Noridet, guessing that she referred to Fortoto.

"Yes, indeed, and I'll tell you all about him—"

Jules pricked his ears and prepared to listen attentively, but just then a quarrel arose between the card-players, and, in the midst of it a man hurriedly opened the door and burst into the place, hustling some of the players who had risen to their feet. "Take care how you walk!" called out one of them. "What are you bursting into a respectable place in that way for?"

"It isn't my fault, I didn't see where I was going."

"Why don't you look, then?"

These remarks were exchanged in a loud tone, and the landlady remonstrated by saying: "Gentlemen! gentleman! be quiet, pray!"

The players, who were now ready to leave, followed her advice, and, settling their scores, walked towards the door. The newcomer's shrill voice had, however, attracted Noridet's attention. "Alfred Brossin!" he muttered to himself, as he caught sight of the dandy's profile, by peering through the window of the niche where his table had been set. "I might have known it! That animal has manners peculiar to himself!"

It was, indeed, the baron's presumptive heir, and his appearance was as strange as his presence in such an out-of-the-way establishment. Wet from head to foot, badly splashed with mud, his clothes in disorder, and his hat pushed back, he stood, shifting from one foot to the other, and rolling his eyes about with a frightened look. "He is as tipsy as he can be; but what the deuce can he have come here for?" thought Noridet, who made a sign to the talkative landlady not to betray his whereabouts. Being quick of perception she readily understood him, and tipped him a wink to that effect. "What shall I serve you, sir?" she asked young Alfred, who replied in a tipsy voice: "Whatever you like. Rum, kirsch, anything, so long as it is something to drink."

"It seems to me that you have been drinking something already," said the landlady, taking up a decanter, while Alfred sank heavily into a chair with his back to Noridet's hiding-place. "I have had a jolly dinner," he



confessed, with a certain air of satisfaction, "but the people who say that a fellow can drown his sorrow in wine are idiots."

"You have sorrows then, sir?"

"I should say that I had!"

This exclamation was unmistakably sincere, but young Brossin at once realised that he was very imprudent, for, striking the table on which the little woman had now set the decanter and a glass, he added: "But my sorrows don't concern you."

"Keep them to yourself then."

Alfred met this tart reply with a drunken leer, and muttered in a sneering tone: "She's a stunner! upon my word. She thinks that I'm going to tell her my business! Still there's really something striking about her; she's really quite stylish, tip-top, indeed!"

This flattering remark did not prove a success, however, for the woman merely shrugged her shoulders and remained scornfully silent.

"I say, my beauty," added Alfred, "is this the Boulevard d'Italie?"

"Of course it is. What then?"

"Then Monsieur de Monville's house isn't far from this little hole?"

"Dear me! this seems to be the day for visitors to Monsieur de Mouville!" giddily exclaimed the landlady.

On hearing this, Noridet raised his finger to his lip and his gesture was at once understood.

"What do you say, my angel?" gasped Brossin between two hiccoughs.

"I said that the gentleman you mentioned often received visitors."

"Well, he will have me as a visitor, for you see, I can come to a better understanding with him than that fool of a Jules—" Under any other circumstances, Noridet would have promptly chastised the speaker, but he was too much interested in listening not to keep quiet. "He always wants to have his own way, does Jules," resumed young Alfred, "but Mouville, now, is a real true nobleman. I feel sure that when I have told him all about my little matter it will all be set right—of course it will!"

Noridet, who had not lost a word of this talk, vainly endeavoured to guess what project young Brossin meant to carry out. "This is a queer street, anyhow," continued Alfred. "I have been pottering about in the mud for an hour, and am no better off than I was at first. Never mind, though! I had the luck to find your little boozing shop open, and if I hadn't, I should have had to sleep in some ditch."

"Boozing shop!" repeated the landlady, "you call my house a boozing shop?"

"Don't be angry, my princess," said Alfred, swallowing a full glass of spirits; "just show me my way, and I'll be off." Thereupon he laid a gold coin on the counter, and at sight of the money the landlady grew calmer.

"The house that you are looking for isn't very easy to find, especially at this time of night," she said with some embarrassment. Noridet had just held up a couple of louis with which he evidently intended to reward her for refusing to direct Alfred, and she did not care to miss them.

"My husband hasn't come home," she added, "and I can't leave my place. Some one in the neighbourhood might, perhaps, direct you."

"Some one in the neighbourhood, do you say? Here we are!" exclaimed a husky voice at this moment; for the door had just opened to admit two suspicious-looking characters, of the kind always found roaming

about the outskirts of Paris. They were not alike, however, for one of them was tall, thin and bony, looking like the "skeleton men" shown at fairs, while the other was squat, knotty, and hairy, and might have rivalled with Arpin the wrestler, nicknamed the "terrible Savoyard;" however, both bore upon their degraded countenances the marks of the worst vices and debauchery. Such faces are not to be described; but with each of them the main characteristic was a pair of moustaches shaved to a level with the nostrils so as to form two hirsute commas above their pallid lips.

These repulsive beings startled Noridet. In spite of the respectable appearance of the "Friends' Meeting Place," and the gracious manner of the dame at the counter, he began to fear that he had got into some suspicious den, and would willingly have beaten a retreat. But in order to leave, he must have passed in front of young Brossin, and, drunk as the latter was, Noridet feared that he might recognise and accost him. He therefore continued to look on, and this was the easier as he could hear and see everything without being seen himself.

"What's up, my good woman?" asked the tall, thin loafer, the one who had spoken as he came in.

"Why this gentleman is asking his way," replied the mistress of the place with a prudish look. She thought that Noridet would think ill of her chatting with such customers as these, and so she was on her dignity.

"Aha! a man of fashion!" exclaimed the squat man, stopping before the table where Alfred was emptying his decanter.

"What does he want?" asked the tall one.

"I want somebody to—to take me—to—to my friend Monville's," stammered young Brossin, who had reached the final limit of intoxication; "for he is my friend, as I am going to fight—a—a duel with him."

"Oh! you want to see that rich chap who stays at the corner of the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette?" said the tall fellow, suddenly changing his tone.

"Yes; and I'll—I'll give you a louis if you'll—take me—there."

"Twenty bob! as much as that, my prince? All right. But you must give us time to drain a glass," resumed the scraggy man. "Come on, Madame Roubion, a glass of something stiff, and hurry up!"

The little woman complied, drawing herself up with an offended air, and the two unmannerly brutes seated themselves in a corner where they talked together in a low tone. Alfred, on his side, began to hum a tune, rocking himself to and fro with the automaton-like motion of an idiot; while Noridet, blocked up in his corner, reflected as to the next step to be taken. He had not the slightest doubt but what young Brossin had fallen into the hands of the worst kind of thieves; still he did not consider himself called upon to protect him. On the other hand, he wished to find out how Alfred would set about entering M. de Monville's house; and, moreover, he wanted to ascertain if the negro whom the landlady had spoken of were really Fortoto. He thought he might manage everything by letting the fop and his escort leave the establishment a little in advance; and by following them a few minutes afterwards when he had obtained the information he desired from Madame Roubion. He reflected that Alfred and his escort would certainly be found near Monville's residence.

"Whenever you please we'll go," suddenly said the tall thin man, rising and approaching young Brossin.

The latter rose with difficulty and went off, followed by the two scoundrels, who, as Noridet could see, glanced at one another in a manner

that augured nothing pleasant for young Brossin. However, Jules kept still until the door had closed upon the party. "You see now," said the landlady, "I was quite right when I told you that we had to serve all kinds of customers in this place."

"The fact is," said Noridet, "that those gentlemen didn't appear to amount to much."

At the same time, he rose up and approached the counter, determined to obtain the information which he needed in the shortest possible time. "Yes," said he, "they were rough-looking customers, and they broke in upon us just as we were having an interesting chat."

"Ah! yes," replied the landlady, "I was telling you about that black fellow—"

However, it seemed fated that Noridet should never hear Madame Roubion's story, for, at this moment, a rough voice was heard swearing savagely, outside.

"My husband!" exclaimed the woman in consternation. "Pay me at once, sir, and go; he is as jealous as a tiger, and I'm sure that he will pick a quarrel with me if he sees you here."

"Who would have thought of finding a jealous man here?" thought Noridet, who was very much vexed.

"Three francs, sixty," added the gossip, hurriedly, as the door opened.

The tender spouse, who had announced his advent with a volley of oaths, was a red-faced man with a corpulent figure. He wore a knitted waistcoat, and a green alpaca apron, the usual outfit of the Paris tavern-keeper, and waved in his left hand a stout vine prop, with which he apparently intended to caress the shoulders of his sensitive better half. His eyes rolled about in a most alarming manner, but Noridet was not easily frightened, and this ogre-like fellow did not terrify him at all; however, he saw to his great annoyance, that it would not be possible to prolong the conversation. Madame Roubion was looking at him in a way which plainly signified: "Pray leave;" and there was no hope that she would say another word. So Noridet was obliged to make the best of it, that is to retire, and return some other day to obtain further information from the chatty little woman. Besides, he must follow Alfred and his dangerous escort. "Please to give me my change, madame," said he, with the utmost composure; "it is still raining, and I do not wish to miss the last omnibus."

The landlady tremblingly obeyed, while her husband muttered: "You must have very little sense left you to keep the place open till this hour."

"It is my fault," said Noridet in a pleasant tone; "I was caught in the storm, and if your wife consented to serve me it was only because I persistently urged her to do so, as she wanted to turn everybody out."

Madame Roubion gave Jules a grateful look for having taken her part, but the husband retorted: "All right. I didn't ask you to say so much. If I have the police after me for it she shall pay for it; that's all. And I know what I mean."

Noridet was greatly tempted to chastise the fool for his insolence, and could have done so had he cared about it, for he understood boxing; however, he repressed his angry wish, and merely bowed politely to the little woman so as to win her over, as he wished to make her talk on some future occasion. "Thank you, madame," said he, and thereupon he went out.

The poor creature lacked the courage to reply to him, and he had not gone three steps when he heard her husband shouting at her in a rage.

"I hope that he won't quite beat her to death," quietly said Noridet to himself as he walked along. "Madame Roubion is a valuable acquaintance when a fellow wants to find out anything."

The storm was over, but the night was very dark, and the lamps cast but a dim light around. Noridet looked about him. On his right, near the old Fontainebleau gate, a few lights glimmered afar off, with the lanterns of an omnibus. A dull buzz rose from the city, but near the tavern there was no sign of any human being.

Noridet strongly suspected that the tall scraggy fellow and his squat companion intended to rob Baron Brossin's heir, but this did not disturb him in the least; however, they might, perhaps, really intend to take the young fool to M. de Monville's house and in that case Noridet intended to make use of them as a sportsman would make use of a pointer. "I have a presentiment that that fool Brossin will be of use to me, and here, to-night," he muttered as he walked on.

The main thing now was to find out which way Alfred had gone. He had not been in a condition to walk fast, and it was possible that he had fallen to the ground. At all events, whether the rascals who had undertaken to guide him were doing so or not, it was clear that they must have gone down the boulevard, as Noridet was now doing. He reached the gate of M. de Monville's grounds and saw no one; but he now thought that he detected a faint glimmer among the trees. Was this from a lighted window, or was it a lantern? It was impossible to decide, and in order not to let Brossin get too far ahead of him with his two formidable companions, he hurried on to the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette, which was now darker, quieter, and lonelier than before. "The deuce take it," muttered Noridet, "they have walked faster than I thought they would, and yet they must have gone this way, for if they had followed the boulevard, they would have met that surly bear, who came into the café just after they went out. Roubion was certainly coming down from the Fontainebleau gate and he wouldn't have passed the rascals without grumbling at them for staying so late at his place. Had he seen them he would have quarrelled with his wife on the plea that she had drunkards in the place at too late an hour."

Reasoning thus, and not unwisely, Noridet hurried along, and he was not far from the little side door in the wall, when he heard the rapid rumble of a vehicle. The sound came from the side of the boulevard, and Noridet's quick ear told him that it was not occasioned by a cab. It was too smooth and regular, and could only come from a well-built carriage drawn by good horses.

Noridet instinctively crouched down in the shadow of a penthouse stretching over a high stone wall in front of the little door, and he had scarcely done so when the carriage turned the corner of the street, and drove up to within ten yards of his hiding-place. It was an elegant brougham, driven by a coachman in livery, and drawn by two superb bays. It appeared certain that the ever-fitting Monville was now about to show himself.

No one appeared, however, and Noridet at last concluded that the brougham must be waiting for Monville to come out of his house. Indeed, a slight noise now caught his ear, and seemed to proceed from a kind of shanty set against the wall of the grounds, beyond the door. It seemed as though some one were scraping the tiles of this outhouse, or walking softly upon the roof. This noise suddenly ceased, however; but all at once Noridet heard a faint whistle from inside the grounds. The coachman

coughed loudly, and the same time turned his horses, the brougham sweeping round so that it faced the boulevard. "Monville mistrusts some one," thought Noridet, "and does not wish that any passer-by should see a carriage stopping before the little door. Ah! it opens at last!"

At this moment a tall man appeared upon the threshold, threw a rapid glance around him, and, reassured, no doubt, by the silence and loneliness of the street, walked quickly to the carriage. Noridet could not distinguish his features, but his figure appeared to him too stalwart for that of a young man of twenty-two. However, the stranger climbed into the brougham which immediately dashed away; and without losing a moment Noridet bounded across the street towards the little door by which the person who seemed to be in so great a hurry had left the grounds. Strange to say, this door was still open, and surprised by this lucky chance, Noridet quickly ran in and found himself in the grounds. He was still wondering how it was that so careful a person as the man who had just driven off should leave the door of so well guarded a house ajar, when, worked no doubt from a distance by means of a spring, it abruptly closed and shut Noridet in the grounds. He was caught in a trap as it were, and he began to regret his recklessness. He, who calculated every step he took, had this time yielded to a sudden rash impulse which might carry him much further than he wished, and compromise all his plans. He was not afraid in one sense of the word, but he feared being forced to reveal his identity to the mysterious Monville. Whether he went boldly to the house, or was caught in the very act of spying, he would find it hard to explain his presence at such an hour in grounds surrounded by a high wall. People do not enter places by stealth when their intentions are avowable, and this adventure might end in the most commonplace and unpleasant manner, that is to say by an arrest. This prospect was anything but agreeable, still Noridet tried to keep up his spirits. "After all," he said to himself, "the worst that can happen to me will be to be taken to a station-house by some over zealous servant, and I shall be let off when I give my name and address. I shall never be taken for a burglar, and if, on the contrary, I find this Monsieur de Monville here, I will tell him the first story that comes into my head."

Suddenly remembering, however, that Fortoto might be in the place, he stopped short. "He would denounce me to his employer," he muttered. "But no! he wouldn't dare do so! He has always had a certain liking for me, in spite of everything, and now that Alcamo is dead, for good, who knows whether he wouldn't be willing to pass over to my side? The main thing is to find out what he is doing in this strange place, if, indeed, he be there."

Having made sure that the weapons with which he had provided himself were ready for use in case of need, Noridet now began to look about him. He soon saw why it was that the house was invisible from the outside. The trees were extremely dense and grew close to the walls of the strange structure, upon which Noridet presently lighted, after gliding cautiously through the grounds. It was a miniature mediæval castle, with a pepper-castor turret at either end and ogival windows. It had but one upper storey and reminded one of the manor houses often seen on the Western part of France. It seemed, moreover, to be quite uninhabited, even uninhabitable, for there was no stir and no lights, no panes of glass in the windows, and no closed door to prevent access to a vaulted hall which ran through the building. The strange sight completely disconcerted Noridet.

It seemed to him impossible that Monville could really live in such a place as this, and he concluded that this eccentric nobleman must have some other abode than this place, which only seemed suited for bats and owls. The idea that there was no one inside urged him to stroll round the feudal structure, and it seemed to him that the masonry was still quite fresh. "I see!" he thought; "this young gentleman from the provinces likes 'modern Gothic,' and so he is having a castle built with cross bars, peep-holes, turrets, and all that. While he is waiting for his battlements to be completed, he has probably located himself in the house of the former owner situated somewhere else in this park."

This conjecture was well founded, for scarcely had he passed the castle than he descried a long building, of simple appearance, built in the modern style. A lawn extended between the feudal pile and this modest structure which had some of its windows lighted up. "It is evidently here that he lives," thought Noridet, "and now I must decide what I had best do next." He leaned against the wall of the unfinished chateau and began to reflect, still examining the frontage of the modern house. He soon saw lights moving about on the second floor, and, thereupon, the thought of finding a better post for observation occurred to him. By entering the feudal structure, and climbing to the top floor, he might be able to see what was going on in M. de Monville's house, and perhaps even recognise the people inside. Fortoto might be there. Besides, such an ascent offered other advantages. Noridet relied upon being able to find a point sufficiently elevated to enable him to overlook the whole park, and find a means of egress. Accordingly, he lost no time, but stole into the vestibule of the mediæval castle. "Monville has wretched taste," he muttered, as he glanced at the heavy structure. And, indeed, it seemed as though an intelligent man would have chosen a better style of architecture. It seemed as though this building, which as a castle was anything but a success, was the model of some old family mansion, perhaps the place where Monville's ancestors had formerly lived in state. Noridet did not think of this, however, for he said to himself, "A man who builds such a sponge-cake as this, must be a fool, and if we meet I am sure that I shall be able to make him believe anything that I may choose to tell him."

With this comforting thought, he went down the hall, and, in spite of the darkness, soon found a spiral staircase which led to the upper floor. He went up keeping close to the wall, and after climbing some forty steps, he came to a landing of moderate width, which he began to examine. To his great surprise he now found a door. In a house open to all the winds of heaven, this was a fortunate discovery, and an unexpected one, but Noridet did not take time to wonder at it. He found that a key was in the lock, and so he boldly opened the door, finding himself, to his amazement, on the threshold of a room lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling. A glance sufficed to take in the length and breadth of this apartment, which he saw was quite unoccupied. Accordingly he went in, and closed the door behind him. A first rapid glance showed him a single window in the thick wall, a window the shutters of which were securely closed. Accordingly no one could see him from the modern house, nor could he on his side see it.

Noridet, with his heart beating fast, now began to explore this strange room, which alone, within this unfinished castle, seemed to be inhabited. The furniture comprised some chairs of antique form, coffer in the style of the sixteenth century, and an immense oaken table. Above the panels the walls were covered with Cordova leather, and there were two full-length

portraits facing one another. Noridet approached to examine them, and his surprise was great indeed. One of these portraits represented a woman in court dress, such as was worn in the eighteen century, but it was not this presentment of a great lady of the time of Louis XV., which most struck our night prowler, it was the other portrait, that of a tall old man of lofty mien, dressed in a singular costume. He wore high boots of undressed leather, a green doublet with a broad white belt, in which a pair of pistols was thrust. His right hand rested upon the handle of a long hunting knife, and there was a plumed hat upon his head. The dress, in a word, was that of some leader of insurgents, and Noridet might well have been surprised to find this souvenir of the civil wars of France; however, it was not this that astonished him in the picture. The features of the personage depicted recalled in the most striking manner a face which he knew only too well. Except in years the face was that of the mysterious Count d'Alcamo.

The night-prowler recoiled at sight of this speechless canvas, as he would have recoiled at sight of the man whom he had, so to speak, twice killed. He thought himself the dupe of some illusion, and asked himself whether his nerves were not playing him a trick, by thus evoking a gloomy remembrance, but vainly did he scan the picture in every position, it always presented the severe haughty features of his persecutor. It even seemed to him that the eyes followed his own, and the impression was greater than he cared to confess. "After all," he said to himself, when he had somewhat recovered his calmness, "this Lugos surely did not call himself Count d'Alcamo without having the right to do so. He really had ancestors of noble birth, it would seem. But why did his highly respectable father—for this seems to be that worthy gentleman—dress like a Vendéen chief, and how is it that this picture hangs in the Gothic mansion of this man Monville?"

Noridet now began to realise that some mysterious link must have bound the owner of this abode to Andrée Salazie's mysterious guardian. This discovery greatly complicated the situation. There was now no hope of being able to approach M. de Monville in a friendly manner: this young nobleman must be Alcamo's successor in his work of vengeance, and so it became necessary to beat a speedy retreat. This room so well lighted in an unfinished building must have been prepared to receive some one, and at any moment Noridet might be caught like a rat in a trap. It was not an easy matter to find a way out of the grounds, but it was better to attempt to do so than to remain here. Besides, Noridet had a feeling of indefinable uneasiness whilst in presence of the terrible portrait, and he longed to fly. He therefore started down the stairs again, and five minutes later, he reached the grounds without meeting anyone.

The windows of the modern building were still lighted up, and it even seemed as though there was some stir inside, for Noridet distinctly heard some doors being opened and closed. This was an additional motive for retreat, and he hastily plunged in among the trees. His idea was to return to the door by which he had been able to enter the grounds, for it occurred to him that the person who had driven away in the brougham would possibly return, and that as he came in, he, Noridet, might manage to slip out. He accordingly hid himself near a clump of lilacs and nut-trees, thick enough to hide his figure, and near enough to the door for him to rush out of the place at one bound. Once installed in this shelter he kept extremely quiet, accepting without wincing the prospect of waiting, perhaps for some

hours. His position was not painful, inasmuch as the night was not a cold one, and the rain had ceased falling; still his reflections were far from enlivening. He regretted his imprudence in entering the grounds, and wondered what could have become of young Brossin. "If I could only meet that rascal Fortoto," he muttered at last, "I should take the liveliest pleasure in wringing his neck."

Just as he uttered this savage wish, he thought that he heard a rustling of branches at a short distance from his hiding-place. He listened attentively, and after a short interval, he heard a more distinct sound, a thud—as if some heavy body had fallen on the ground. Noridet now thought that some one had entered the place by climbing over the wall; but this seemed so unlikely that he kept still till he could make sure whether he was in the right. He soon knew what to think, for he heard the significant words:

"I'm over; hand me over the 'swell.'"

The speaker tried to speak as low as possible, but he was so near to Noridet that the latter did not lose a syllable. He now began to understand the situation. A grumbling noise followed the call, and the sound of a fall was again heard, but this time it was much louder. "The deuce!" said some one, "I think he's stunned from falling too quick."

"Wait a bit, I'll help you to pick him up," said some one from the top of the wall.

Then there was a rustling of leaves, and almost immediately a trampling followed by a faint cry. Noridet now understood everything. The two tramps with whom Alfred Brossin had foolishly become acquainted, had just ushered him into Monsieur de Monville's grounds by a route which he had certainly never expected to follow. This scaling of walls at night time strangely complicated matters, and Noridet foresaw the possibility of being mixed up in some story of robbery and murder. The idea of going to Alfred never occurred to him, for, although he could brave danger to rid himself of an enemy, he was not inclined to risk his life to save a fool who annoyed him. So he kept perfectly still and listened. "Come, my little fellow, give your paw to your friends, who are going to introduce you to the master of the house," said one of the scoundrels.

"I cannot," murmured Alfred in a tearful voice; "you see very well that I can't walk."

"It would be better to leave him and do the job without him," said one of the thieves; "it would take too long to drag him to the cellar."

"That's a fact," said the other; "he's so full of liquor that he couldn't help us, and we can carry off the bags ourselves."

"So we can! and really I don't know why you brought the fool here instead of turning his pockets inside out and chucking him into a ditch beside the boulevard."

"You are smart, eh? Don't you twig my little game? Suppose they catch us in the house, why then, his respectable relations will hand us some coin to prevent our speaking, and besides, they'll hush up the whole matter?"

"That's true; his people must be tip-toppers, for the ticker we nipped is worth five hundred francs at the least."

"Yes, but that's not everything. Come on, let's leave him here and get ahead."

"Are you sure of finding the cellar?"

"Didn't I tell you that I had been working for three days in it and know how the lock acts?"



"Come on, then, sharp ! Wait here, a bit, my boy," said one of the men to Alfred, "we'll go and see if Monsieur de Monville is at home, and we'll come back and let you know."

The unfortunate Alfred replied by a long groan. It was evident that he was too much intoxicated to stir. "And just shut up," added one of the ruffians, "unless you want us to take the taste of bread out of your mouth, for good !" Having given the baron's paltry heir this last warning, the thieves crept softly away.

Noridet had not lost a word of this edifying talk, and anxiously asked himself what would be the result of it. Just at this moment he heard a vehicle coming up the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette. It was, no doubt, the brougham returning. Indeed the vehicle stopped short, the strange whistle again sounded amid the night, and almost immediately Noridet with inexpressible satisfaction heard the spring, securing the door, move back. It did not take him a second to slip into the street, and so dexteriously did he manage it, that the mysterious personage, who had returned in the brougham, did not catch even a glimpse of him. In fact Noridet took care to turn to the right, and was lost in the darkness before the stranger who had alighted and was approaching on the left hand reached the door. The prowler, so miraculously delivered, decamped as fast as he could, but he had not covered more than thirty yards, when two reports of fire arms broke upon the stillness of the night. "Ho ! ho !" said Noridet, "what if these knights of the road have rid me of Fortoto, and Monville too ? That would be strange, indeed !"

## XXV.

ON the very same day which had proved so unlucky to M. Brossin, junior, whilst Jules Noridet was consulting the sorceress of Montmartre, M. Mornac's residence in the Rue d'Assas presented a very animated sight. The Mornacs had in fact returned from Switzerland that morning, and there was a constant hurrying to and fro of busy servants, porters carrying trunks, and valets opening windows and polishing furniture. Madame Mornac was presiding over the arrangements with her usual spirit, and trotted about from the drawing-room to the staircase as though she had grown twenty years younger. It is true that her serene spouse had long since abandoned all household government to her, and that it was not an easy matter. The ex-notary's spacious abode would easily have held a regiment, and his garden occupied ground enough to establish a model farm thereon. There was no resemblance, however, between M. Mornac's retreat, and the gloomy abode selected by M. de Monville, for all was fresh, bright, and lively—flowerbeds studded with roses, lawns carefully rolled, limpid ornamental water peopled with gold fish, and a marvellous conservatory full of tropical flowers. As for the house, reached by a sandy courtyard, it might be considered a finished specimen of modern architecture, that is to say, it combined elegance with comfort. There was nothing mysterious about the entrance, and the humblest people in the neighbourhood had access to the place, for M. Mornac was always ready to give advice, and his wife to bestow alms. It must be added that the ex-notary had established his consulting office in the conservatory. He said he had suffered so much for twenty years from the smell of mouldy documents that he deserved compen-

sation for it, and he declined to say another word on any legal matters save in the midst of fragrant heliotropes.

That day, whilst Madame Mornac was busy with her servants, the worthy man was already giving a consultation at the foot of a splendid orange-tree, being with his farmer from La Beaudonière, the estate in Normandy, where he had not returned since his eventful stay in November. Old Daugué had just set a big bag between two pots of geraniums, and had put into his pocket a receipt which M. Mornac had signed on the bottom of a watering-pot.

"Now d'ye know, sir," said the peasant, "it's not to compliment you, but, I'm always glad when I get a sight of you, and I didn't think that I should see you to-day, for the mayor at home said that you were travelling abroad."

"Yes, we have been in Switzerland, but we made up our minds to come back after a dreadful accident in which my wife and Mademoiselle Andrée so nearly lost their lives."

"That must be a bad sort of country," said the old Norman, gravely, "and the ladies would do better to take a trip to Biville."

"But it seems to me, Daugué, that your coast is a pretty bad place, too. Last year, without that poor young man who turned out so badly, and whom you called Jack of the Cliffs— But, by the bye, have they sold his old shanty at the Black Rock yet?"

"Why, sir, haven't you heard the story about it?"

"What story?"

"Why, it's the only thing talked about in the district."

"Well, no one knows anything about it here," said M. Mornac, smiling, "and I should like to hear what it is."

"Well, you'll laugh, that's all; for it's as surprising as the tale of 'Little Tom Thumb.'"

"Tell me all about it Daugué, tell me all about it."

The farmer had just opened his mouth to begin his story when Andrée appeared at the door of the conservatory. Her charming face still bore traces of the fatigue and emotion of her short and terrible trip on the Rhine; but, from the smile that played upon her lips and the brilliancy of her large black eyes, it was easy to see that she was glad to gaze again at this retreat full of flowers, where she had already spent many happy hours.

"Good morning, my dear child," said M. Mornac, kissing her upon the forehead; "how did you sleep? and how is your dear godmother?"

"Better, a hundred times better than in the chalet. Ah! if you only knew how glad I am to be back here again!"

"The fact is," said the notary, with a glance of satisfaction at his horticultural treasures, "the fact is, there are no such azaleas as those at Schaffhausen."

"You are busy, I see," now said Andrée: "so I will run back to Madame Mornac; there is enough for both of us to do to arrange godmother's room."

"Bah! she knows very well how to manage everything by herself, and it seems as though I had not seen you for an age. Sit down there, my dear Andrée, and listen to the great news that Daugué has brought us from La Beaudonière, and Biville, and the Black Rock. It seems that it is something 'highly sensational,' as they say about plays now-a-days."

M. Mornac laughed at his own allusion to the style in vogue on the

Boulevard du Crime, and was too busy bringing forward a chair for Andrée to observe that she had grown very pale.

"Well then, monsieur and mademoiselle," began Daugué, "you know that the legal chaps seized the little bit of ground that remained to Jack of the Cliffs, and the house along with it, if you can call it a house, on account of the lad taking to his heels and going off, and there being more than twenty charges against him for poaching, and trespassing, and so on; and it had all led to such a lot of costs, that it seems the lawyers had made a pile of money."

"Yes, yes," said the notary, "my agent at Dieppe wrote me about it. Seizure, posters, sale, and all that. If poor Jack should come to life again he would find he had nothing left but his eyes to cry with."

"There's no danger of his returning now, for, even if he isn't dead, he would find the place taken."

"Explain yourself more clearly, my friend, and pray proceed, for I am very much interested."

The farmer perceived that his story was awakening attention, for Andrée came gradually nearer, and listened with the liveliest interest. "I must tell you," he resumed, "that last week, just before the day of the sale, an old gentleman dressed in fine broadcloth, with a gold-headed cane, and a very respectable air, came to the mayor's, at Biville, in a fine carriage, and in fact everybody ran to their doors to see the two postillions, and the mayor thought it must be the new prefect."

"But what has this rich gentleman to do with Jack of the Cliffs?"

"Oh! that's the fun of the thing," resumed Père Daugué, who wished to make the most of all his "points." "It seems that the fine gentleman was the agent for the owner of the Black Rock, and came to pay all the expenses, so that nothing should be sold."

"What! what! Jack of the Cliffs with an agent, and money to pay his debts?" said the notary, in amazement.

"No! no! not he; the other one; the *real* Monville."

"Daugué, I don't understand what you mean."

"I couldn't make it out, either, till the notary there explained it all to us. It seems the agent showed the mayor papers proving that his master was the only heir of the Monvilles that used to live in our parts before the Revolution, you know?"

"But I thought that Jack really descended from that old family. Didn't you just tell me, at La Beaudonnière, that his father and his grandfather used to live at the Black Rock, and that no one had ever disputed their right to the property there?"

"Oh, yes, that's so! But it would now seem as if Jack were only some little vagabond that the last Monville picked up, somewhere or other; for the new one, the one who has just arrived in France, has all the papers he requires to show that he was the son of the man who is dead, you know."

"Then, this unfortunate lad was only an imposter? I cannot believe it."

"And I declare it to be false," said Andrée, in a firm tone.

"Why, good heavens! mademoiselle, we all know that Jack was a good-hearted fellow, all the same, and not afraid to risk his life for other people."

"Yes, he saved two persons who are dear to me," said M. Mornac.

"But what does Valensole say about all this?" he added, after a moment's pause,

"Well, he says that when people are poachers they begin by a breach of the laws, and end at—Cayenne."

Andrée cast down her eyes on hearing this.

"Valensole seems to me to be rather too severe," said M. Mornac. "After Jean's flight there was nothing whatever to show that the terrible charge against him was true, and I still persist in believing him innocent."

"Thank you, sir," said the young girl in a low tone, pressing her old friend's hand.

"I am only afraid that the poor young fellow will never be able to return to France again," added the notary, not without a motive.

"They say in our part that the new lord of Monville is going to have the Black Rock built again, and in grand style, if you please; and they say that Baron Brossin will be as mad as fire at no longer having the handsomest château in our part."

"Then, the new-comer is very rich, it seems?"

"He must be, for the notary swore that he knew him to have more than a hundred thousand francs' income, and ready money to boot—so as to buy the forest of Monville, and a lot of land along with it. It seems he must have found a mine over there, over in America, in what they call California, you know?"

"It may be so, after all," muttered M. Mornac. "But no one in the country has seen this great millionaire yet?"

"Oh, no! he's not such a fool as to show him yet awhile. He's in Paris, where he's having a good time of it, till the Black Rock place is ready to receive him. All the same, if he would stay there a month every year, it would help the people of Biville along ever so much."

The notary at that moment was thinking of anything but the future prosperity of the environs of Dieppe. He remembered that M. Franchard, his successor, had told him just before his departure for Switzerland that a very rich client had been sent to him who bore the name of Monville, and he hazarded to all kinds of conjectures as to these strange coincidences. "Thank you for your information, Daugué," he said at last. "Next summer we shall talk all this over at Biville, and perhaps we shall have a chance of meeting the fortunate owner of the Black Rock."

"Ah!" said Andrée at this moment, "I remember that Madame Mornac wants me to hang up the water-colour pictures that I brought from Switzerland, in godmother's room," and thereupon, rising up, she vanished like a bird.

"I must have hurt her feelings again," thought the good notary, "still I cannot encourage her liking for Jack of the Cliffs."

Daugué, delighted at the success of his story, was turning and twisting his hat in his hands before taking leave. Just at this moment a servant entered the conservatory with a card which he handed to his master, for Madame Mornac had forbidden her dependants to deliver cards upon a silver salver, as customary among the aristocracy. "The gentleman asked if you would receive him, sir," said the servant.

"This is strange!" said M. Mornac, after reading the visitor's name on the card.

"Well, good day, sir, and all present, I'm off," said the farmer, including the man-servant in his collective politeness as he bowed himself out.

"Good-bye and good luck to you, Daugué," called out M. Mornac, who was now puzzling his brains over the card.

The old peasant went off quietly, like a true Norman, and the notary, as

soon as he vanished among the trees in the garden, turned to his servant and said: "Show the gentleman into the drawing-room."

"Oh, how can I, sir? They are waxing the floor."

"Take him to my private room, then."

"But, Madame Mornac is there, arranging the papers."

"The dence fly away with zealous women!" grumbled M. Mornac. Then, after scratching his forehead a moment, he added: "Bring him here; he won't mind chatting among the flowers."

The servant thereupon went off, and his master again read the name written upon the card. "I really must be dreaming," muttered he. "Count d'Alcamo!—that was certainly the name of the foreigner who disappeared one fine night from Baron Brossin's château, and whom Jean was accused of having murdered. It is written that I shall always be followed about by this story; but, after all, I shall be glad to have a chance to talk plainly to this Italian nobleman, who took it upon himself to present Andrée with twenty-five thousand francs a year, if, indeed, this be he, for—"

At this moment, M. Mornac's soliloquy was interrupted by the voice of the servant, who ushered the visitor into the green-house with the same gravity as though he were bringing him into a drawing-room. The personage, whose aristocratic name was thus announced, came in with perfect ease, and looked so distinguished that the notary was, at first, somewhat taken by surprise. "Pray, sir," courteously said the foreigner, "pray to excuse me for introducing myself. I ought to have written to you, of course, to ask you when and where you would be kind enough to receive me; but I was very anxious to inquire after the health of Madame de Mathis and Mademoiselle Andrée."

"The ladies are very much obliged to you, I'm sure," stammered the notary, who, although he dimly remembered having seen the stranger before, could not get over his surprise at hearing him speak with as much interest of the Mathis family as though he had been an old and intimate friend. "They are as well as could be hoped for," he added, "after all the fatigue of their journey; but may I ask you why you do us the honour—"

"True," interrupted the foreigner, "you remind me that I ought to have begun by explaining my visit more clearly to you. A word will suffice to make you understand my anxiety. I have come here to resume the conversation which I had with you at the door of your cottage at Schaffhausen, on the evening of that terrible day when two persons who are dear to both of us so nearly perished."

"What! was that you, sir?" exclaimed M. Mornac.

"It was; and believe me, only grave and unforeseen incidents prevented me from returning on the morrow to assure you of my interest in them, and, allow me to use the word, my protection."

"But we heard that a foreigner—at least, so it was said at Schaffhausen—had perished in the same fire in which the strange gentleman who rescued my wife and Andrée was lost, and I feared—"

"That I had shared his fate? No, I am safe and sound, as you see, although, last year, it was supposed that I had fallen victim to a crime which was a purely imaginary one."

"For which a poor lad, who was quite innocent, was arrested," exclaimed the worthy notary. "I am only too glad, sir, to have the ocular demonstration of your existence, and to thank you for giving me an opportunity

for a serious conversation with you, such as I have been wishing for, I may say, during fully six months."

M. Mornac had gradually recovered his coolness, and was looking at the stranger with the calm and sagacious eye of a magistrate.

"It isn't my fault that our interview did not take place sooner," replied the count; "and if you will do me the honour to listen to me, I will reply beforehand to all the questions which you might be inclined to ask."

"Speak, sir," was the notary's answer.

"You are aware," said Aleamo, "that a few days after the frightful event which deprived Mademoiselle Andrée Salazie of her guardian and of her betrothed, I called at the château at Chevreusc."

"I am aware of that, and it is about what passed between you and our dear girl that I wish to speak to you."

"Well, this is what I desire to explain. When I asked to see Mademoiselle Andrée in the presence of her godmother, I came to fulfil a sacred mission, in fact, to carry out her father's wishes."

"But we have always supposed that her father was lost at sea."

"But Monsieur de Mathis never had positive proof of that, and I am able to prove that Captain Albert still lives. He was called by that name on the isle of Bourbon, though his real name was one of the oldest in France, and one that Mademoiselle Andrée need not blush to bear."

"Then, why prolong the false position of a poor girl, if, indeed, you can prove that her father is still alive?"

"Her false position will not last much longer."

"Hum," said the notary, growing animated, "you gave Andrée a state bond entitling her to a large income?"

"Yes. Her father confided it to me, and she need not hesitate to accept it."

"The money is untouched, and will remain so; in fact, she will prefer to return it to you unless her father shows himself. Where is he? What is he doing? Why does he only communicate through an agent, like yourself? I say this without disrespect to you, personally, but if I had the happiness to possess a daughter, I would travel from China merely for the sake of embracing her," exclaimed M. Mornac, and with such earnestness did he raise his arms as if to appeal to Heaven that he nearly knocked down some of the magnificent orchids hanging from the glass roof of the conservatory.

"In another month Andrée will no longer need to call herself an orphan."

"You mean to say that the person who calls himself her father will then appear? I would remark that I do not believe much in what is called 'the voice of the blood,' and that I should advise Andrée to be very careful as to what she believes in that respect."

"She will be free to do as she pleases, sir, and she will receive her father with open arms."

"You forget that she was too young to have even the faintest recollection of his features; you forget that there is no longer any one living who remembers Captain Albert."

"I beg your pardon, there is one person, a woman, whose testimony you would not refuse, Madame de Mathis, who saw Andrée when an infant, who knew and loved her mother, and who has not forgotten the man whom Jeanne Salazie chose for her husband."

"Jeanne! that was indeed the name of Andrée's mother," said M. Mornac, somewhat shaken in his incredulity. But he added almost immedi-

ately : "Unfortunately, Madame de Mathis has lost the power of speech and of motion."

"Powerful emotion might restore it."

"That is true ! The doctors have always said so," exclaimed M. Mornac, forgetting his mistrust in the thought of his old friend's possible recovery. "On the day of the accident in Switzerland, when the boat was carried away by the current, she was at the window, and the German servant who took care of her said that she waved her hands and articulated a few words, but, alas ! when I saw her afterwards she was worse, in fact her fright brought on an attack which was mainly the cause of our determination to return to Paris."

As M. Mornac finished speaking, he saw that the count's eyes were full of tears, which proof of kind feeling favourably impressed him. The good man had, in the practice of his profession, learnt to hate romance and mystery. So he was but little disposed to believe in the strange promises of resurrection made by Alcamo, and yet he felt drawn towards this stranger who showed such a genuine affection for Andrée and Madame de Mathis. By dint of turning the odd affair over in his own mind, he ended by admitting that all he had to do was to wait and see what time would bring forth, and it seemed to him idle to wound the feelings of a well-bred, and, to all appearance, well-intentioned man. "Well, count," said he, with mingled politeness and dignity, "you will, surely, not blame me for being careful when the fate of a young girl whom I love as though she were my own daughter is concerned ? I feel highly honoured by your visit, and I trust that it will not be the last."

"Thanks for your confidence. You will not find it misplaced," said Alcamo. "I assure you that before a month has gone by, Mademoiselle Andrée will have her father with her, and will bear her own name, and possess her own fortune. I ask but one favour until then. It is to allow the son of my most intimate friend, a young man whom Andrée's father loves as I do, to visit here."

M. Mornac's face expressed great embarrassment. "I should be delighted to do anything that would be agreeable to you," said he, with some hesitation, "but a young man whom we don't know, and that while we are in mourning for a friend—"

"Be quite easy on that score," interrupted the count, "he will be introduced to you by Monsieur Franchard, your successor, who has charge of part of his property, and who can tell you all about him."

"What is his name, pray ?"

"The name of my young friend is Jean de Monville."

A stifled cry came from behind Count d'Alcamo, who quickly turned. Andrée's pale face appeared amidst the flowers at the entrance of the conservatory, and the count rose, trembling with emotion. He made a visible effort to remain calm, but joy got the better of his will, for he opened his arms, and Andrée fell upon his breast. For a few seconds nothing was heard but sobs and exclamations. "You !" repeated Andrée ; "is it you whom I again behold ? Oh ! how I have wept for you !"

Alcamo was silent because he lacked the strength to speak, indeed it was easy to see that he was overcome with joy. M. Mornac, the sole witness of this scene, was perfectly stupefied at seeing a stranger press Andrée to his heart, and began to think that she had lost her senses. In spite of her creole birth, the young girl was not of a demonstrative nature, and the worthy notary had good reason to be astonished at this unlooked for agita-

tion. The count was the first to recover his self-possession. "Forgive me," said he to M. Mornac, "for not being able to resist the first impulse of my heart. The daughter of—of my friend is as dear to me as though she were my own, and my feeling was but natural."

"Yes—certainly—certainly—I do not deny that," replied the worthy man; "but you will admit, sir, that propriety—" And here he paused to whisper in Andrée's ear: "My dear child, I doubt whether your godmother would approve of all this."

"I am sure that she would be as happy as I am," said the young girl so earnestly that M. Mornac's scruples were overcome.

"Shall we go to see her together?" said he.

"Godmother owes her life to you," said Andrée to the count; "it was Providence that brought you to Chevreuse on the night of that dreadful accident at the château."

"What! is this gentleman the foreign physician who saved her?" exclaimed M. Mornac. "My wife forgot to tell me that."

"I am sure that she would be as happy as I am," said Alcamo, "but I would to heaven that I could have rescued all who perished then."

"Excuse me, sir, but I was in Switzerland when poor Mathis died—but now that I know the truth, pray believe that I have every confidence in you. Our house will always be open to you and to your young friend, Monsieur Jean de Monville."

"I thought that I was right," murmured the young girl, leaning against a chair to support herself, so great was her emotion. "Who is the person bearing this name, Monville?" she asked, trembling.

"You will see him, Andrée," replied the count, looking tenderly at her.

There was a moment's silence. M. Mornac had already begun to reflect that the rich young man so highly recommended by M. Franchard might be a good match for his adopted daughter, and he no longer thought of opposing the stranger's views.

"Mademoiselle," resumed Alcamo, who had succeeded in becoming somewhat more formal in his manner, "I told you long ago to summon me if ever a danger threatened you. I shall now be near you to watch over you constantly. To-morrow I will bring Monsieur de Monville to see Madame Mornac, I hope."

"What are you saying?" ejaculated the notary's impetuous wife at that moment as she abruptly entered the conservatory; and then suddenly recognising Alcamo, she added: "Good heavens! I'm not mistaken. So it's you again! Are you going to appear and vanish, just as you did at Chevreuse and in Normandy! Look how frightened Andrée is! as pale as death! It's all very well for you to be her father's friend, but what a strange way you have of acting; and who is this Jean de Monville, you speak of? It makes my brain whirl, all this, I can tell you. I shall soon lose my senses."

"Madame—" began the count.

"Oh! I know, it's all very well; but you curdle the blood in my veins, dying and coming to life again, and all that! It was said that the lad from the cliffs killed you, and now you come to life once more, and want to bring him here."

"This gentleman came to ask after Andrée at Schaffhausen on the night of the accident on the Rhine," said the notary, as soon as he could get in a word.

"Oh! was it really you?" cried Madame Mornac, suddenly changing



her tone. "Why, then it must have been you who went to find our rescuer in the hut of that fisherman Fritz; the coachman told us so—the man who drove you. But you ought to be dead again, if it was really you! That was a dreadful fire! How did you escape? We heard that you tried to save the man who rescued us, while he was being drowned in the Rhine after the fire. Oh! how I should have liked to have seen him again, and rewarded him!"

"I did all that I could to save him," said the count with emotion. "But he hurt himself in leaping into the Rhine to escape from the flames. I held him up for nearly ten minutes trying to reach the bank; but the current was fearfully strong, the night very dark, and he was swept away."

"It seems as though Heaven were unjust!" exclaimed Madame Mornac, quite forgetting to pursue her inquiries as to Alcamo himself, and which she had seen fit to address to him personally. "I cannot bear to think that all this might not have happened had we gone in search of him that very day. We do not even know his name, although we owe our lives to him, Andrée and I."

"I questioned the authorities, and could learn nothing," said the notary.

"But now I think of it, you must know his name," said Madame Mornac to Alcamo; "you must know where he came from, and why he lived so mysteriously, for you saw him and talked with him. For my part, I never believed that ridiculous story about his looking like a death's-head, and I am sure—"

"I never knew," interrupted the count, "the real name of the man who perished before my eyes, but I saw that he had been disfigured by a terrible shock which his system had received, and what I learnt of his story showed me that there were sorrows in life which I had no idea of."

"Tell us, my dear sir, tell us whether he left any family whom you might help us to find and relieve."

The count seemed disposed to relate the story of Pierre Lefort, but he was prevented from doing so by Madame Mornac, who seeing her gardener throw down his rake and hurry to the gate shouting out a variety of bad language, called, "Here, Germain. What are you up to? Insulting the passers-by again?"

On hearing this the gardener returned, and approaching his mistress said, "Oh, madame, it's that ugly scamp who hides half his face. He's always here."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, madame, he's a fellow who looks like a thief and he's always prowling about the house, and each time I see him there's sure to be an accident. Why, only yesterday he showed his ugly mug while I was in the kitchen garden, and the bell-glasses on the melons broke without any one touching them—the proof is I cut my thumb with the broken glass, and madame would do best to warn the police—"

At this moment an exclamation of affright from M. Mornac abruptly curtailed the gardener's narrative. A flower-box containing a huge cactus had fallen from its stand without the slightest warning, throwing Andrée upon the ground.

## XXVI.

ON the morrow of his visit to M. Mornac, Count d'Alcarno alighted from a well appointed brougham in front of a stylish house on the Boulevard Haussmann. He was as calm as usual, though Andrée's accident on the previous day had for a moment seriously alarmed him. Fortunately the young girl was but slightly hurt, and having made himself easy on that score, the count, who perhaps had reasons for wishing to conceal his feelings, had profited by the general dismay to take hasty leave. He was now sure of being admitted to the house in the Rue d'Assas whenever it pleased him to call.

The handsome place to which he drove on the morrow was the abode of Baron Brossin, the eminent banker. It is nowadays the custom to "air" in splendid residences the fortunes which people make by speculation, and those who succeed on 'Change like to be lodged in princely style. This is a kind of advertisement which informs the public that the owner of the house has a large fortune, and the credit acquired by such means is solid. M. Brossin had not neglected this means of corroborating favourable rumours, and indeed he had been one of the first to build on the new Boulevard. So handsome was the Brossin mansion that the baroness was much better lodged than many grand duchesses of the defunct Germanic Confederation. There was a sanded courtyard in front of the main entrance, a garden under her bed-room windows, and a profusion of old trees, bought of a ruined nobleman who had been forced to turn his ancestor's park into money. These trees had been brought to the house in waggons, and, thanks to modern ingenuity, replanted in the ground there. Besides all this, there were reception rooms in which, when a ball was given, some very aristocratic names were announced, to the great delight of the baroness, who had been plain Ismérie Coquillard before she married M. Brossin. There was also a gallery of paintings which the owners admired on the strength of what the dealers had said about them, for in point of fact none of the Brossins could tell a Titian from a Dubuffe. However, although the baron had sacrificed largely to luxury, as regards his mansion, he had not forgotten that his fortune had been made in business, and upon a plot of ground near his baronial manor he had constructed a simple and convenient house for his offices. He could communicate from his own private apartments with the office where he planned the numerous operations from which he derived his large income. He had merely to open a door and pass through from one house into the adjoining one to change from a banker into a baron, and vice versa. It was, it appeared, the banker and not the baron whom Alcarno wished to see on this occasion, as he abstained from asking for admission into the mansion, and proceeded to the building in which the offices were located. The staircase was less crowded than usual that day, and he met no one on the first floor. He turned the handle of a door bearing a brass plate inscribed: "Bank Offices," and in doing so an alarum sounded, whereupon a lad in a brown livery appeared and asked his name just at the moment as a glass window slid back at the end of the office. The head which appeared at this window, was that of M. Bouscareau, the respectable cashier of the baron's no less respectable bank. Bouscareau undoubtedly recognised the visitor, for he did not give him time to reply to the boy. "The baron is in his private office," said he, in a deep bass voice.

"Ah, ah," thought Alcamo, "waiting for me, it seems? "

"Usher the gentleman in," called out Bouscareau, and thereupon he closed the wicket again.

The office-boy, divining the importance of the new-comer, assumed a very respectful manner and at once showed him along various mazy passages with doors covered with leather and set with brass nails.

"I see how it is," thought Alcamo; "the baron's private room really communicates with the office, and while I am being promenaded along these passages, Bouscareau has gone to tell his employer of my arrival."

When he entered the private room, however, the baron was alone. Dressed in a morning suit, in the English style, M. Brossin appeared, however, more plebeian and older than usual. "Let no one in," said he to the attendant, as he rose and went to meet Alcamo. "This is very kind of you, count, very kind indeed," he continued, taking both of his visitor's hands. "I feel greatly honoured by your call."

"I should have come yesterday, my dear baron, but I had to attend to a thousand matters consequent on my arrival here, and even to-day I have but a moment, and must beg you to apologise for me to Madame Brossin."

"The baroness was delighted to hear of your arrival, and she will be charmed to receive you at an early day; however, she is somewhat indisposed just now."

"Why, you yourself, appear to be poorly, baron."

Indeed, M. Brossin looked either greatly fatigued or very anxious. "For the last two days I have been far from well," replied the financier, with evident embarrassment; "but it will be nothing, I hope."

"You make me regret having chosen so bad a time to talk about business. I am afraid that I shall tire you."

"Oh, no, count, not at all. I should be very sorry to miss the opportunity of talking with you about business."

The baron's embarrassment increased, and Alcamo, who had seated himself near the handsome solid mahogany writing-table, gave the financier a cold, clear look. "Our business is very simple, and can be settled in a quarter of an hour," said Alcamo, resuming his smile. "I have called to take back the stock which I deposited with you when I went away last autumn, and no doubt, instead of disturbing you about the matter, I ought to have gone direct to your cashier; but I wished to shake hands with you."

M. Brossin had been pale before; he now was ghastly. "I do not know how to apologise sufficiently for being obliged to ask you to call again," said he. "But the stock was taken to the Bank of France as a precaution you see, and to withdraw it, it will be necessary to wait."

"How long?" asked the count, frigidly.

"A day or two, perhaps; I will ask Bouscareau, my cashier," stammered the baron, who was beginning to talk at random.

"Oh! it is idle to disturb Monsieur Bouscareau. I will wait," was the count's reply. The baron drew a long breath. "I should not have come to see you about this trifling matter," resumed Alcamo, with an air of indifference, "if the stock had really belonged to me; but it was only confided to my care by a friend. He is now about to give it to his son, who is going to be married, and so he asked me to take it out."

At this point a nervous spasm distorted M. Brossin's face. He was evidently in agony. "I explain matters to you, my dear baron," added Alcamo, "so that you may not think that I lack any confidence in you. Besides

I don't care for a million more or less, and if you happen to be running short just now, I beg of you to believe that I am quite at your service."

M. Brossin started up in his red morocco arm-chair and tried to speak, but could not utter a sound.

"Now that I think of it," added Alcamo, "in the midst of such extensive transactions as you engage in, it may happen that without being seriously embarrassed, you may at times have need of a large sum just for a few days."

"I admire your financial instinct, count," said the baron, recovering a little composure as his hopes revived; "there are sometimes temporary difficulties in large banking businesses, which one has to cope with—This very morning, now—"

"Oh! I don't need any explanation, my dear Monsieur Brossin. I cannot leave my friend's stock with you, but I can do as I like with my personal fortune. Let us go to the point. How much would you require?"

"A million would be ample," said the baron, in a voice husky with emotion.

"Very well. Do you wish it to-day?"

"If it were possible. I confess that—"

"It is quite possible, but only on one condition."

"I accept that beforehand."

"Oh, it isn't a very hard one. You must come to fetch it yourself."

"Certainly, count, I shall be only too happy."

"Don't be in such a hurry," said Alcamo, laughing. "Wait until I explain what must be done and why your presence is indispensable."

"That is useless, count, perfectly useless. It is only proper that I should save you the trouble and inconvenience of returning here, and it will, besides, give me an opportunity to call upon you. I am really sorry to have obliged you to suggest this, and—"

"Excuse me, my dear sir, I should be delighted to receive you at any time, but the money is not deposited at my house."

"Wherever it may be, I cannot let you take the trouble to send it to me," said the baron, with somewhat too much eagerness.

"It would be difficult to do so," said Alcamo, "and for this reason: We Sicilians are very primitive people. There is some Arab blood in our veins, and our habits are not altogether those of civilized people."

M. Brossin looked at the count in surprise, endeavouring to conjecture what financial matters could possibly have to do with the blending of races. "To give you an idea of our savage habits," said Alcamo, "I must tell you that in money matters we follow the Eastern system."

"Certainly, count. The Eastern system has its good points," replied the baron, who no longer understood in the least degree what the count was talking about.

"Well, in the East, capitalists keep their money in a chest, and when they want any they take it out. They have a holy horror of all the pink, white, and blue paper which you call stock, and my good fellow-countrymen are like them in that."

"Their reasoning is good enough," replied M. Brossin, to flatter his formidable visitor, "and the fact is that sometimes those strips of paper—"

"Ruins their owners? I know that, but still it is absurd to let one's money lie unproductive. But would you believe that I have always had a mania for hoarding up treasures?"

"Oh, count, you can never make me believe that you are a miscreant."

"Let me explain. I mean that I prefer gold to paper, which does not prevent me from spending money lavishly. We savages from the south of Europe are fond of everything that glitters, you know."

"Of all that is beautiful and all that is good," replied the baron, enchanted at being able to get in a compliment.

"That is why," resumed Alcamo, "I instructed my agent in Sicily to turn the yield of my vineyards and flocks into fine bright jingling gold pieces, like piastres and Spanish doubloons, for which I have a great liking. Do you like Spanish doubloons, baron?"

"They are handsome coins, very handsome coins," stammered M. Brossin, who had suddenly turned very pale.

The count fixed his cold, clear, steel-like eyes upon the banker, and remained for a few seconds without speaking, either because he was absent-minded, or wished to give the baron the time to recover from some unaccountable agitation. "I was saying that I have the weakness to like those large gold coins which glitter like the sun; my steward has always some on hand for that very reason. He sends them to me when I have not time to fetch them myself, and I live on my little treasure without any more care on my mind than a petty citizen of the Marais."

"And you have neither failures nor a fall in value to fear."

"I fear none but robbers," replied the count, coldly; "but I beg you to believe that I know how to guard against them. Besides, I have another motive for always keeping some money by me. I sometimes conspire a little, as I was telling you the other day at the races, and a man who does that, may find himself an exile at any time, and be deprived of his estates. So it is advisable to keep on hand some money that can be at once turned to account."

"Very prudent, count! Would to Heaven that we could take such precautions in the banking business."

"Unfortunately, that is impossible, is it not? Besides, the prosperity of commerce, the development of industry, the activity of all transactions would suffer if you kept money lying idle, whereas on the contrary, in the hands of an honest and intelligent man like yourself— Ah! yours is a high mission, baron."

"I try to contribute a little to the general prosperity of my country," said the banker, with an affectation of modesty.

"But I am allowing myself to be carried away by my enthusiasm," resumed Alcamo, "and I must return to what interests you now. I returned from that expedition of mine which failed with a half-dozen kegs filled with my favourite coins. My steward has been lucky this year, and I think that he has got hold of all the doubloons in circulation in our poor little ex-kingdom of the Two Sicilies, for I have brought enough to supply all the money-changers in Paris for six months; however, on arriving here I was not a little embarrassed. I had engaged a suite of rooms at the Grand Hotel, and, however comfortable it might be, I could not take my kegs there. The people at the hotel would have taken me for a wine merchant travelling with specimens of his stock."

The baron considered himself called upon to laugh heartily at this joke, but all the muscles in his face were on the stretch as he waited for the end of the count's narrative.

"Well, while waiting until I could buy or build myself a house, I found myself obliged to think about placing my gold in a secure place."

"And you naturally placed it in a bank."

"Not at all, baron, not at all! That would have been according to custom, which we semi-African Southerners hold in horror. To draw my funds, I should have had to go through all sorts of formalities, which I hate as I do the plague. I was obliged to look for a secure and convenient place, where I could act according to my barbarian custom, that is to say, open my chest and take out a few handfuls of gold whenever I needed any."

"You could have done that here," timidly suggested M. Brossin.

"No doubt; but I did not know, when I arrived, whether you were in Paris, so I went to one of my friends who happened to be living in such a way as to admit of my doing what I wished. Just fancy his living in a house, or rather a château, with towers and an immense park, and a great cellar, of which I have the key, and where I am sure all my doubloons are perfectly safe."

"Oh, then, I say no more!" replied the baron.

"Now that you understand the situation, what I have still to tell is very simple. You would like to have your million to-day, would you not?"

"Yes, indeed, if it were possible, but I would not be troublesome for anything in the world."

"As I have made you the offer, baron, you can accept it without any scruple. Now let us arrange matters. At what hour will you be free to go with me to my friend's."

"Whenever you please, count—this evening, or at once, if you prefer. But—"

"But what?" said Alcamo, looking the baron straight in the face.

"Won't it be difficult to move so large a sum in gold?"

"Doubloons are not so heavy, nor do they take up so much room as you may think, and I will guarantee to you that sufficient of them to represent a million francs will go in my large brougham comfortably. I need not explain to you why I prefer not to take any subordinates into my confidence. A treasure right in the midst of Paris is tempting, and it is better not to tempt anybody."

"I should also prefer," eagerly replied the baron, "that no one in my employ should know anything about the matter."

"I can understand that, but, after all, it would be tiresome for us to remove all this gold ourselves unaided. Still, I can ask my friend to help us, unless you have some absolutely safe person on hand."

"I have my cashier."

"The old man who was with you at the races?"

"Exactly."

"He does not appear to be very strong, but if he can be relied upon—"

"Oh! I can answer for him as for myself."

"That is all right, then. I have a few matters to attend to this afternoon, and I shall only be at liberty in the evening. Shall I call for you with my carriage at nine o'clock?"

"I am entirely at your orders, count."

"Very well, it is all settled, then. Now let me ask you on what day I can come for the Northern railway stock. I beg pardon for insisting upon that matter, but the young fellow who is to have it on marrying is madly in love, and consequently in a hurry to complete all the formalities which are delaying his happiness. It is at his house, by-the-bye, that I have deposited my doubloons."

Since Alcamo had again begun speaking of the Northern railway stock, the baron's face had assumed a singular expression, and any observer with

ordinary intelligence would have seen without the slightest difficulty that he was struggling with himself. When he heard his visitor say that the stock belonged to the guardian of the treasure, he thought that it would be as well to inspire full confidence by giving it up at once. He had asked for a delay when he had believed that he had no recourse but to abscond with the deposit which had been confided to him, but now that he relied upon the promised million, he had no further interest in retaining the precious paper.

"Well, count," said he, composedly, "I perhaps made too great haste in telling you that the stock had been taken to the Bank of France. I gave the order only recently, and it may not have been attended to as yet. If the stock is still in our safe I can give it to you at once."

"That would suit me exactly. I have the receipt which you signed with me."

"Well, I will see whether it is here," said M. Brossin, pressing the knob of an electric bell.

Half a minute later the cashier's cunning face appeared at the half-open door. "Have we still got the two thousand certificates of the Northern Railway stock deposited by Count d'Alcamo?" asked the banker.

"Yes," replied the cashier, after a slight interval of hesitation.

"Then bring them to me immediately. You see, count, that all is for the best," added the baron when he was again alone with his visitor.

"You are a charming man, baron, there's no doubt of that. Is that the worthy fellow who will come with you to-night?"

"Yes, count, if agreeable to you."

"Of course. I like his face. What is his name?"

"Bouscareau, count. He is an old employ   of mine, and entirely devoted to me. We began business together."

"Ah! indeed! I thought so when I saw you chatting so confidentially with him on Sunday at the races."

A cloud passed over M. Brossin's face; but he was about to resume the praises of his cashier when the count exclaimed: "And Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin whom I was forgetting to inquire after. She is as charming as ever I suppose. When shall you marry her?"

The baron turned ghastly pale. "My daughter!" he muttered, with an air of consternation.

"Is she indisposed like Madame Brossin?"

"Ah! count," sighed the financier, "I'm a most unhappy father."

"What do you mean, baron?" cried M. d'Alcamo with keen interest.

M. Brossin was about to explain himself; but his cashier returned at that moment carrying a large package of paper. "Here is the stock," said he, dryly, placing his parcel upon the desk; "you can count it."

"That is altogether unnecessary," said the count, producing his pocket-book. "I will hand you back the receipt, and our accounts, dear sir, will then be settled."

At this moment M. Bouscareau's face was a perfect study. The contempt which he felt for his employer was perfectly legible on it, and also very lively curiosity as to the intentions of Alcamo. He looked askance at him and seemed to ask himself by what skilful process the foreigner had induced M. Brossin to give up the deposit. On the evening before a long conversation had taken place between the banker and his cashier, who had advised him to hold on to the stock till the last moment.

"Bouscareau," now said the baron, "be here at half past eight."

"But I have an engagement, sir," grumbled the old man, who was not much disposed to put himself out to oblige his employer.

"No matter," said the baron, somewhat harshly. "The count is going to deposit a million with me on current account, and I must request you to be punctual."

"Very well, sir," replied the cashier, only disguising, with difficulty, his astonishment at this talk of an un hoped-for million.

"Excuse me, dear sir," said the count, as soon as M. Bouscareau had retired. "You will think me too Sicilian, perhaps, but the expression 'current account,' sounds ill to me. I am not going to 'open an account' with you at all. I find that you need a million, and I lend it to you for two, three, or fifteen days as you like; but I don't want any recognition in writing or any interest. I am simply obliging an honest man, one of my friends; but I never speculate."

M. Brossin was overcome by so much generosity, and could only stammer out: "As you please, count; the habit of using business terms made me speak of opening an account; but—"

"Let us say no more of this trifling matter, and let me ask you about your daughter, Mademoiselle Henriette? Your language alarmed me just now."

The baron had momentarily forgotten his daughter, but he now again assumed an aggrieved expression. "Ah! count," said he, "fathers have terrible troubles at times, and I don't know which to complain of the most—my son or my daughter. Alfred has not been seen at home for more than twenty-four hours. No one knows what has become of him."

"Can you be anxious about such a trifling matter as that? For a father who lives in Paris you really surprise me, baron. Your son must have been 'making a night of it' at his club or elsewhere, and is afraid to come back for fear of your anger. I'll venture to say that you lectured him only yesterday."

"Indeed I did, and I had need to, for you cannot imagine how far he goes in his misbehaviour. I have remonstrated with him twenty times, but it does no good."

"Well, what would you have? Young people are not brought up as they used to be, and paternal authority is out of fashion now-a-days."

"It appears that Alfred borrowed some money at some money-lender's; I learned that yesterday from his mother. The bill was presented, of course, and my man-servant told me that he ran off like a madman. I am afraid that he has thrown himself into the river."

"The deuce! that would be frightful! But no, baron, I can't believe it. Monsieur Alfred never appeared to me likely to commit suicide, and besides, a man does not renounce life so easily when his father is Baron Brossin, a millionaire several times over."

"I wish that I shared your security, count, but something happened here this morning which increases my agony. I am told that two strange-looking men came to ask for Alfred—two men whom the doorkeeper described as looking like detectives."

"Good heavens! can it be that your dear Alfred is conspiring against the Government?"

The baron shook his head, and lowering his voice, replied: "I am afraid that something worse than that has happened; I am afraid that the wretched boy has dishonoured himself by doing something wrong, and that he is being looked for."



"What are you saying, baron? You cannot think it. Good blood is always true to itself, and your son, the son of an honest man, could not have degraded himself like that."

Count d'Alcamo spoke these words in a clear and piercing voice, and with his eyes riveted on the baron.

"I am perhaps alarmed about nothing," said Baron Brossin, quickly, "and it is true that in my family no one has ever—"

"Committed a crime?" interrupted the count. "I am sure not! Monsieur Alfred may have indulged in some piece of youthful folly, and that is all. I feel sure you will find your 'prodigal son' by to-night, and, if I'm there, I shall beg of you to forgive him."

"Heaven hear you, count!"

"But tell me why you are also so uneasy about Mademoiselle Henriette."

"For the same reasons."

"How for the same reasons? Your daughter surely can't spend her nights at a club or borrow money of usurers?"

"All the same she has disappeared like her brother. And, count, I am so effected by all this that it will perhaps do me good to ease my heart. I can talk to you as to a friend."

"Certainly; and I shall be very happy if I can do anything to alleviate your distress. But tell me the truth quickly, for you really alarm me."

"Well, ever since we were at Biville Henriette has been looking very poorly, and so much so that the other day her mother talked of sending for the doctor. However, the foolish girl pretended she was quite well, and there was a bit of a quarrel, I believe. I don't know whether that was the cause of it all, but yesterday morning she went out alone telling her maid that she was going to mass at the church of Saint Augustin hard by, and since then she hasn't been seen—"

"Dear me. How extraordinary! And you have made inquiries?"

"Certainly; but it is a very delicate matter you see—the poor child's reputation might suffer—"

"Of course, of course, but didn't your inquiries lead to any result?"

"It seems she was seen taking a cab, which went up the Boulevard Malesherbes, and this cab might perhaps be found again; but in that case I should have to confide in the police and it is so distasteful to me—"

"I understand that!" interrupted the count. "But, baron, excuse me, have you ever noticed that your daughter had an attachment for any one?"

"Well, last year, we thought that she rather liked Monsieur Jules Noridet whom you met at Monville, you will remember. And, indeed, we thought that he would prove a very suitable husband for her; but his conduct has been very reserved all through."

"Well, baron," said M. d'Alcamo, "have you confidence in me?"

"Oh! fully."

"Then you will authorize me to try and find Mademoiselle Henriette?"

"Willingly; with pleasure and gratitude."

"Very good then. Our appointment holds for this evening I suppose?"

"Quite so," said the baron, becoming a banker once more.

"Then I will say good-bye," rejoined M. d'Alcamo, rising, "perhaps I shall be able to settle all the matters that interest you, to-day."

Just as the count was about to leave, M. Bouscareau discreetly entered the room to announce a fresh visitor. The baron evinced considerable surprise as he listened to his cashier's whispered remarks, but, finally ringing for an office-attendant, he had M. d'Alcamo shown out by way of the mazy

passages which he had previously traversed. The new visitor was, no doubt, ushered in by another route, at all events the count reached the boulevard without meeting any one. Having given some orders to his coachman who at once drove away, he then started on foot for a cabstand at a few paces up the thoroughfare. There were several vehicles waiting to be hired, but the count proceeded straight to a kiosk at the end of the stand, where a superintendent was dozing over his register. Alcamo promptly roused him, however, and exclaimed: "I have come to inquire after a fan which a lady forgot in a cab which she took on this stand yesterday."

"Have you the number of the vehicle?" asked the superintendent.

"No, unfortunately the lady didn't keep it."

"Then, I'm afraid, sir, that the fan won't be recovered. You might try at the lost property office at the Prefecture of Police, but I fancy the lady will have to resign herself to her loss."

"And the driver to the loss of the forty francs' reward which I should have given him?" said Alcamo.

While this talk had been going on, two or three idle cabmen had gathered round the kiosk, and the promise of a large reward had made them prick their ears. "When did this lady take her cab, sir?" inquired one Jehu of the count.

"Yesterday morning between nine and ten," said Alcamo at a venture.

"What is she like?"

"Tall, young, thin and rather pale."

"Didn't she come out of the house with the big doorway over there?" and so saying the driver pointed to M. Brossin's mansion.

"Quite so. Did you notice her?"

"Of course I did; for I drove her, and precious ill she looked, too. But as for leaving any fan in my cab that's not true. I'm an honest fellow, let me tell you, and have been ten years on the box."

"Oh!" said Alcamo, "I don't accuse you. The lady must have left the fan at one of the places she drove to. The best plan would be for you to drive me there."

"You know where she went?"

"Of course I do."

"All right, then, I'm willing. This way, sir," added the cabman, and he led Alcamo towards his vehicle.

The count was delighted with his good luck; and as soon as they were out of the hearing of the superintendent, his manner changed.

"Now, then," said he to the cabman, "the forty francs are for you, if you remember the place where the lady left you and take me to it."

"Oh! oh! so you don't know where it was? And you didn't come for the fan? I suspected as much; but no matter, the bargain holds good. It won't be the first time that I've helped a gentleman to find his sweetheart."

"You are sure of not making a mistake?" said Alcamo.

"No, no, never fear. But get in, sir, and I'll drive sharp."

"And you may rely on your forty francs," rejoined the count as he stepped into the vehicle which was an open victoria.

The driver whipped up his horse and they started off. The count was jubilant, for he was convinced that Henriette had driven to Noridet's to try to persuade Jules to elope with her. He was confirmed in this suspicion by the direction which the cabman at first took, but when after going along the Rue St. Lazare, the vehicle left the Rue du Helder neighbourhood on

the right and turned up the hilly Rue des Martyrs towards Montmartre, his ideas underwent a sudden change, and he began to wonder where Henriette could possibly have gone. They crossed the outer boulevard and continued climbing the hill, until they almost reached the summit. Then at the corner of an ascent, so steep that foot-passengers could only climb it with difficulty, the driver abruptly stopped his horse and exclaimed ; "It's here, sir."

"What? here!" said Count d'Alcamo, gazing around at the low, squalid, dilapidated shops and houses.

"Yes, she got out here and went up that hill on foot."

"Hum," said the count, and pulling out his purse he gave the driver the promised forty francs. "Come now," he added, "you shall have twenty more if you tell me where the lady really went."

"Well, I'm agreeable, sir," replied the Jehu. "But we can't talk here," he added, noticing two or three loafers standing by.

Near at hand, fortunately, there was a little tavern with some shrubs in boxes round about the door, and two or three little tables set in front. Not a customer was visible. Alcamo took all this in at a glance. "You must be thirsty," said he to the cabman, "come and take a drink here."

The loafers, upon seeing the cab move on to the tavern, strolled away. Alcamo alighted, and a minute later he was seated beside the Jehu, half screened by the shrubs. A bottle of beer having been ordered and brought, the count turned to the cabby and said : "Now, my good fellow, tell me what you know, and be brief."

"Well, sir. When I took the young lady, she merely said to me : 'Drive me up the Boulevard Malesherbes : I'll stop you when necessary ;' but when we got some way off, she pulled a card out of her pocket, and said to me : 'That's where I want to go.'"

"And what was the address on her card?"

"Why, 'Madame Blanchet, Rue de la Fontanelle, at Montmartre.' So I whip up my horse and come here."

"Why here?"

"Well, sir, that hill you see up there is what they call the Rue de la Fontanelle. But as it is too steep for cabs to climb, the young lady got out here."

"But who can Madame Blanchet be?"

"Well, sir, I may tell you that when the young lady got out, I had a drink at this very shop, and I made the landlord talk a bit. And he told me as what Madame Blanchet was a fortune-teller and so on ; and it seems she deals in quack medicines and I don't know what besides."

"Ah, ha!" said the count, and he began to reflect. "Well, I suppose I shall find her up there," he added at last. "Here are your twenty francs, my man ; and now you can go, and thanks. Mind, not a word of this to anyone."

The cabman winked and took off his hat. He seldom had to deal with such a liberal patron. While he climbed on to his box again, M. d'Alcamo slowly ascended the precipitous incline dignified by the name of Rue de la Fontanelle, and before long he perceived the isolated house, on which Aurora's signboard was displayed. "Ah!" he murmured, with a strange expression. "God is just : yesterday the son, to-day the daughter ; this evening we will settle your account in full, Monsieur Brossin."

Then, without hesitating, he walked into Aurora's abode, the street-door of which was, as usual, open ; however, in the passage he met the old

servant woman whom Noridet had seen on the previous day. "What do you want, sir?" said she, abruptly, and with but slight respect for the count's imposing appearance.

"Madame Blanchet."

"Is it for the cards?"

"Yes, and I'm in a hurry."

"All right. Madame's there, so come this way." And thereupon, without further ceremony, Alcamo was ushered into the presence of the sorceress.

The raven was flapping about the room, and Aurora was bending over a spirit-lamp engaged in preparing some mysterious beverage. She turned, however, as the count entered the room, and suddenly started back with wild, affrighted eyes. Alcamo, on the contrary, advanced, and an exclamation of surprise escaped his lips.

"Aurora!" he cried, recognising the old negress.

"Captain Albert!" she shrieked, in abject terror.

"Ah!" added the count, clenching his fists. "I ought to have known it. So you are in Paris, you infamous poisoner!"

"He isn't dead," groaned the negress. "Ghorab didn't deceive me. Ghorab never lies."

"You wretch!" cried Alcamo. "So once more I find you on my path. It didn't suffice that you should teach Noridet your infernal art whilst he was yet a child. God, who punishes murderers, has sent me here to make my vengeance all the safer."

"I defy you," rejoined Aurora, grinding her teeth. She had suddenly regained all her composure, and now added, contemptuously: "I know your secret, remember!"

"Listen," said M. d'Alcamo, coldly: "I care not what you know; I am willing to spare you the scaffold, but only on conditions that you obey me implicitly."

"And what are your orders?" asked the negress, ironically.

"To hold your tongue and leave France."

"But you might denounce Jules, all the same. What guarantee have I that you wouldn't harm him?"

"My word. But if you refuse my conditions, I shall be pitiless."

"Oh! I don't fear that. I need only go and tell Andrée Salazie the truth about her father."

At these words, the count sprang forward like a tiger, and Aurora shrieked with abject terror. "Mercy, Albert, mercy!" she pleaded. "You are strong, you are great, you are good, you surely won't kill your slave."

"No, I won't soil my hands with such vile blood as yours," said Alcamo, between his teeth. "But if I learn that you have dared to go to the young girl you have just spoken of, both you and your Noridet shall die upon the scaffold. Mark my words."

"I don't want my white son to die," muttered Aurora. "No; rather than that I will obey you."

"I rely on that; and now listen. A young girl came here yesterday. No denials, pray. I am sure of it, and she must be here now. Where is she?"

"Here," murmured the negress, and she thereupon opened a door communicating with an inner room. But as she looked into this adjoining apartment she gasped in alarm: "Gone! She has gone! she has fled!"

"Wretch! don't try to deceive me!" cried the count, darting through

the doorway into the next room, which proved to be a sleeping apartment in a great state of disorder.

However, it needed but a glance to see that it was empty. On the floor beside the bed there lay a cambric handkerchief. Alcamo, noticing its fine texture, picked it up at once, and saw that it bore the initials "H. B.," surmounted by a baron's coronet. He was now certain that Henriette had been an inmate of the room. Alarmed by her mistress's shrieks, Aurora's old servant had in the meantime appeared upon the scene, and was indulging in various gestures expressive of affright. The count strode towards her. "Now," said he, "if you don't want me to denounce you and your mistress, you must tell me when and how this young girl left?"

"I couldn't help it, sir," whined the old hag, in alarm. "She wanted to go off all the morning, and though she was so poorly and could hardly stand, she dressed herself; and when I went to see her in her room, she scrambled off: there was no stopping her. Besides, she would have called out, and I didn't want the neighbours to hear—"

"Which way did she go and how long ago?" sternly asked the count.

"To the right, sir, down the slope towards the fortifications. It was just before you came. Ah! she can't have gone far, poor thing! for I saw her clinging to the telegraph posts for support."

"And you had the cruelty to abandon her?" said Alcamo; and then, turning to the negress, he added: "You remember what I told you—not a word, not a sign—or death! And now have the door of this den opened for me."

The negress complied without speaking, only she tried to seize hold of the count's hand to kiss it, but he repulsed her disdainfully and left the room, saying in a threatening manner: "Remember!"

Once out of the house, he looked round him and saw no one; and thereupon, without more ado, he began to descend the northern slope in accordance with the servant's indications. Darting along at full speed, he glanced anxiously to the right and the left; and he had gone fully two-thirds of the way before reaching the plain, when suddenly, near a pile of sand, he thought he could distinguish a human body lying on the ground. He was not mistaken, and on drawing near he recognised Henriette. Baron Brossin's elegant daughter was lying at full length on the slope of Montmartre; her hair, unbound, trailed in the dust, and her silken costume had been torn by the thistles and briars in her descent. There was something heart-rending in the contrast between this dingy, barren soil and the heiress's luxurious attire. M. d'Alcamo himself was impressed, for he suddenly became very pale. And yet the woman who lay suffering at his feet was the daughter of his mortal enemy; it was Henriette whom he found fallen to this depth of shame and degradation. But a woman's misfortune disarms the most justifiable hatred, and the count, who would have been pitiless as regards Alfred Brossin, began to commiserate his sister. She seemed completely crushed, but she had not lost consciousness, for she opened her eyes on hearing Alcamo's footfall, and then, giving a faint cry, covered her face with her hands. It might have been guessed that she would have preferred death to meeting the eyes of the man who had seen her so gay and radiant at the Château of Monville, where her misfortunes had originated. However, the count knelt down beside her, and murmured these words, which made her start: "I know everything, my poor child, and I have come to save you."

His voice was so soft, so full of feeling, that Henriette raised herself on her left elbow and held out her right hand. M. d'Alcamo took hold of it, and as he pressed it kindly, a tear fell from his eyes. "I was looking for you, mademoiselle," said he, "and I am glad that I have arrived in time."

"In time?" murmured the poor girl. "No, I'm lost!"

"You are saved providing you have confidence in me."

"But it is too late," said Henriette, sobbing; "I left home yesterday, and my father—"

"Your father will believe my word, and I will find a means of explaining your absence to him."

With a grateful glance the poor girl asked: "I believe you. What am I to do?"

"You must come with me. You are not in a state to see your parents yet awhile, but I will take you to a house where your life and honour will be safe. And later on I will take you back to your father."

Henriette listened eagerly. The count's kind words seemed to restore her to life. "Take me away," she murmured at last, trying to rise to her feet.

With a glance, M. d'Alcamo measured the distance that separated him from the foot of the slope, and in the nearest street, he perceived a cabstand. He thereupon took the poor girl in his strong arms and resumed his descent, without the frail burden retarding his progress. "You have believed in my promises, mademoiselle," he said, "and you have done right. In three days' time—I swear it—the man who has wronged you shall be compelled by me to repair the harm that he has done."

## XXVII.

THE visit which Bouscareau, the cashier, had announced to his employer, was evidently an unexpected one, at least judging by the banker's start of surprise. However, had the newcomer found himself face to face with Count d'Alcamo in the banker's presence, he himself would have been the most astonished of the trio. Indeed this visitor was none other than Jules Noridet who firmly believed that he had consigned Alcamo to a fiery grave by setting fire to old Fritz's hut on the banks of the Rhine. Since his adventures at Monville, Noridet had not seen much of the Brossin family. He had made his mourning an excuse for not attending the entertainments which the baron gave during the winter in his splendid quarters on the Boulevard Haussmann. Still he had occasionally appeared at the private receptions of the baroness, meeting with that warm welcome which Madame Brossin always had ready for all millionaires, young or old, providing they were bachelors and eligible husbands for Henriette. Henriette on her side had alternately displayed haughty coldness and evident liking, and on the whole, it was evident that the unfortunate girl loved this unworthy scamp, and was suffering from his capricious treatment. On the day when Noridet was thus announced at the banker's private office, two months had just elapsed without his having called upon M. Brossin. He had not even seen him as a banker, for he did not care to place any money in his hands. The baron therefore concluded that some change had now taken place in Jules's views, and he resolved to resort to his usual cunning. His self-possession had been greatly put to the test by Alcamo, but the interview

had, after all, ended to his satisfaction, and the hope of having a million that same night had quite revived him.

Noridet came in with an easy air, and was welcomed with every appearance of cordiality. "Where can you have been all this time, my dear sir?" said the baron, holding out his hand to him. "The baroness complains that you never call. She was at the races on Sunday with Henriette, but you did not go to speak to them."

It was not unintentionally that M. Brossin thus spoke of his daughter. He wished to give Noridet an opportunity of doing the same. However Jules simply replied: "I am really inexcusable for not calling upon Madame and Mademoiselle Brossin. But I was not in Paris on the day before yesterday."

"Indeed! Then you are quite excused, my dear Monsieur Noridet. What can I do for you?"

"Allow me to ask you, in the first place, whether you have time for a chat?"

"Oh! yes, indeed. I so seldom have the pleasure of seeing you, that I am glad to profit by the opportunity."

Despite his affable air, the baron had a secret apprehension that Noridet had something of grave import to tell him.

"Well, sir," said Jules, seating himself, "I have a delicate communication to make to you, with reference to your son."

"To Alfred!" exclaimed Monsieur Brossin, turning very pale.

"You know," said Noridet, "that I feel a great interest in him as in all your family."

"I know that, and I thank you. But excuse the impatience of a father if—"

"Have you seen Alfred to-day?" asked Jules, instead of further explaining himself.

"No, nor yesterday," stammered the baron. "As you may know, his conduct is, unfortunately, far from proper, and—"

"But he was at Longchamps on the day before yesterday."

"Yes. He never misses the races."

"Did he say nothing of any mishap at the races?"

"Well, I scarcely saw him when he came back, and he did not dine at home. What happened there?"

"He quarrelled, and exchanged cards with some one."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the baron, "has he been fighting a duel?"

"I think not," quietly replied Noridet, "for yesterday he came to request me to be his second; I consented to do so, but he did not return, and according to all appearances, the matter came to an end."

"Ah, indeed!" sighed M. Brossin, who felt much relieved.

"If there were nothing more than a duel in question," continued Jules, with an easy air, "I should not have come here to disturb you, but Alfred asked another service of me. He wanted thirty-five thousand francs to pay a note."

"Did he dare borrow them from you? What a scamp!" exclaimed the baron, greatly vexed at the thought that he would have to return the money to Noridet, whom he could not put off, as it was so much to his interest to conciliate him. "Don't be alarmed, sir," replied Noridet, with an equivocal smile. "When I oblige my friends I am not in the habit of dunning their parents for the money. However, I did not lend your son any money."

"You were quite right, my dear friend," said the baron gladly; "young fellows' vices ought not to be encouraged."

"Unfortunately, there is something much more serious behind all this," said Noridet, coldly.

"Good heavens! you terrify me. Has Alfred done anything wrong?"

"I leave you to judge, baron. The notes which he had subscribed, and which he wished to pay, were handed to me, and on the back I found my signature, which I had not given!"

"A forgery!" murmured M. Brossin, completely overcome. "Ah, this is the crowning stroke!"

"A forgery, yes. He had evidently used my name to obtain the loan, and had imitated my signature very skilfully, I must say."

"But, my dear Monsieur Noridet," said the baron in a tone of entreaty, "you surely won't ruin a wretched boy who has yielded to a mad temptation, and who has been your friend. I—I will pay the money—I will settle with the holder of the notes; but, I entreat you, don't enter a complaint against him."

"What do you take me for?" said Noridet, scornfully. "Far from wishing to injure Alfred, I have come here to defend him to you."

"Thanks! a thousand times I thank you! you are truly generous, you are most kind and forgiving!" cried M. Brossin, taking the hands of his son's indulgent friend.

"Listen to me, sir," resumed Jules, without being in the least affected by these demonstrations of gratitude. "Alfred is at this moment the victim of a horrible plot, to which I believe I hold the clew, and I have come here to offer to help you in defeating the projects of his enemies, who are yours also."

"I accept your offer most readily. Speak! explain yourself, I entreat you!"

"Do you know what person it is that has quarrelled with your son? It is a young man named Fortoto."

"Fortoto! But it seems to me that I remember—"

"This scamp was arrested last November at Monville, together with another vagabond called Jack of the Cliffs."

"And who escaped from the Dieppe prison?"

"Exactly. This alone is strange enough, but it is not all. This young man was not acting on his own account; he is the tool of a personage who makes people believe that he is noble and rich, although I believe him to be a mere rascal."

"This is incredible! I cannot understand why these people should hate Alfred."

"It isn't Alfred, it is you whom they wish to get at and strike through your family, your fortune, and your honour; and this I will prove to you. The money-lender who laid a snare for Alfred, by lending him this money, on a signature which he knew to be false, is a certain Ménager, whose connection with the band I speak of, I have just discovered."

"Ménager!" repeated the baron. "I have never heard that name before."

"I should think not. This man only transacts shady business, and lives in a kind of den in an out-of-the-way part of Paris. It is chance alone which put me upon his track."

"And you suppose that he has something to do with a plot against my son!"



"I am sure of it, and I also know that the rascals decoyed Alfred, and last night seized upon his person."

"What! Have they dared—"

"They have trapped him into a house where he is kept in durance vile, and no doubt they mean to keep him there until you pay his ransom."

"But this is perfectly horrible! What! in the midst of Paris?"

"Good heavens, yes! It is the system of the Italian banditti perfected for the use of civilized people."

"I will go at once to the prefect of police," cried the baron, "and we shall see whether—"

"That would be a sure way to disgrace your son," said Noridët, quietly. "These people have the proof of the forgery in their hands, and would not fail to make use of it."

"That is true," murmured M. Brossin, "but what shall I do? for mercy's sake, what shall I do?"

"Two things. In the first place, make some inquiries about this Ménager, who lives in the Rue Vauveau. I will tell you the exact number of the house."

"Bouscareau can do that to-morrow. But how am I to rescue my unhappy son from these people's clutches?"

"There is a very simple means, and I will tell you what it is this evening if you will come to a place I will name."

"This evening," stammered the baron, who was thinking of Alcamo's promised million. "I am not free."

"Come at midnight, then."

"Yes. Yes, I can do that, I fancy."

"Be at midnight exactly, on the square at the end of the Boulevard de l'Hôpital. It is near there that the chief of this gang resides. The place I speak of is the old Barrière de Fontainebleau."

"Ah! I know now. And do you really think that you and I alone, without any help from the police, can enter the den where these scamps are hiding?"

"Their den is a very handsome house in a princely park."

"I am at a loss to understand all that."

"I will explain matters. The owner of this superb house is the person with whom Alfred was to fight a duel to-day."

"And instead of going out with my son, he has entrapped him! This is beyond anything, and I will—"

"Let me finish. This person is also a most intimate friend of that young mulatto Fortoto, and took his part at the races, making the quarrel his own. You may think it strange that a rich man should have anything to do with a person of Fortoto's class; but you will be still more surprised at this person's name."

"What is it?"

"He calls himself Jean de Monville."

"What! that elegant young man who passes for having several millions, and who has lately arrived in Paris?"

"The same."

"It is impossible!"

"Have you never wondered, baron, at the singular chance by which this gentleman bears the same name as your estate in Normandy?"

"I never thought it more than a mere coincidence, for the old Monvillies died out long ago, or so it was said in the district."

"Still you are not sure of that," said Noridet.

"Well, that scamp who was arrested pretended that he was their descendant, but no one paid any attention to that. However, this reminds me that my overseer lately wrote to me that a Monsieur de Monville, who must be the same as the one you speak of, has just bought that old place near the Black Rock, and has announced his intention of building a superb château near the ruins."

"Are you sure of that?" eagerly asked Noridet, who was quite startled.

"Quite sure. The shanty and the field near by were to have been sold to meet the expenses of the suits against Jack of the Cliffs, but instead of that all the debts of this vagabond, who called himself the owner of the place, have been paid."

"Had I retained a shadow of doubt, what you now tell me would remove it."

"You think then—"

"Think! Don't you realise what is apparent from all this?"

"I confess," said M. Brossin, "that I don't."

"What! You don't realize that this vagabond, this Jack of the Cliffs, and this Monsieur de Monville are one and the same person?"

"What an idea! This is mere madness!" exclaimed the baron, jumping up from his red morocco arm-chair.

"It is the simple truth," said Noridet, quietly.

"What! Jean! that ragged scamp! that barefooted beggar, with a house of his own, horses, servants, and millions!"

"You have not heard anything of Jean for the last six months, have you?"

"Not since November."

"Well, he has had time to accomplish a good deal."

"But millions! millions! how could he get hold of millions? Unless he has inherited property from some relative in the East Indies, or something of that sort, I don't see how—"

"That is probably what he says to account for his wealth," interrupted Noridet, "but a more likely explanation is to be found."

"I cannot find any."

"Don't you remember what was said in Normandy about him?"

"Well, people said that he was a poacher, and so he was. But he can scarcely have made a fortune by selling the game of my preserves."

"No, indeed; especially as he ate what he caught," replied Noridet.

"I cannot imagine, then, how—"

"You forget that he was believed to have some money hidden in that place of his perched on the edge of the cliff. I only stayed two or three days at Monville, but I remember that it was the favourite subject with the ladies."

"But a Norman, an intelligent man, as all Normans are, would have put his money out at interest, have bought land with it."

"You reason in that way because you are a man of business, but a fellow like Jean, who knew nothing of business matters, wouldn't do as you say, especially as he had good reasons for hiding his money."

"What reasons could a Biville boy have for hiding his treasure when he might have made his choice among all the farmers' daughters round about, and have become the biggest man in the place?"

"Perhaps he had other views," replied Noridet.

M. Brossin fancied that Noridet meant that Jean aspired to Henriette.

He had certainly spoken with peculiar emphasis, and, although the young girl and Jack of the Cliffs had never exchanged a word, the baron, nevertheless, now began to reflect upon such a plan and purpose on M. de Monville's part.

"Besides," added Noridet, "if Jean had displayed his riches it would have injured his lucrative business."

"Business?"

"Yes. As a smuggler."

"Ah! I remember that the custom-house inspector at Dieppe told me last autumn that smuggling was going on very extensively, and that he suspected parties at Biville."

"He was right. But do you remember any details of Jean's escape from prison?"

"No one knew exactly how he managed. Some say that he made a hole in the roof of his cell, then got to a boat, and escaped with his companion; but as the boat was found empty it was believed that both of them had been drowned."

"No, no. Jean must have met a sloop belonging to his friends the smugglers, have gone over to England, and afterwards returned to remove the funds belonging to the band which were at Biville, and now he is cutting a dash in Paris on that very money."

"He is very bold then. He runs the risk of being exposed."

"People change a good deal in six months, especially at his age. Besides, who would look for Jean the poacher in a mail coach drawn by four horses?"

"But how is it that he calls himself Monville, and pretends to be descended from so ancient a family?"

"That is a bold stroke, but a skilful one, and it is not a new game by any means. Under the Restoration, Coignard, the colonel who had been a galley-slave, passed himself off as the Count de Sainte-Hélène."

"He ended at the galleys."

"Of course he did! And that is where we shall send Monsieur Jean, and so that we may lose no time in doing so, I ask you to accompany me to-night when I go to the Barrière de Fontainebleau."

Noridet's assertions appeared plausible enough, but the baron now remarked: "There is one thing which I do not understand, my dear Monsieur Noridet. Why does this young man hate me and my family?"

"Could anything be more natural? In the first place, he always disliked you as he assumed that you were the usurpers of his family estates. Secondly, you had your gamekeepers and the police continually at his heels. Thirdly, you had him arrested and imprisoned and convicted, although he did not reappear."

"No. The matter was allowed to drop," replied the baron, curtly.

"Well, at all events, baron, can I rely upon you at midnight?" said Noridet, rising to take leave.

"Yes, certainly!" exclaimed M. Brossin. "I am obliged, however, to go out this evening with my cashier. Is there any objection to his being one of the party, the plan of which you have not yet explained?"

"I will explain it to you at midnight, and you may bring the cashier with you. He may be useful to us."

With these words Noridet shook the baron's hand, and left him, to spend the rest of the day in indescribable agitation. He could not understand the meaning of all that Noridet had told him. He reproached himself for not having obtained further particulars, although he fully believed in the hor-

rible plot which, according to the young millionaire, existed against himself and his family. Noridet exercised over him that strange ascendancy which a firm will always has over a cowardly mind, and he dared not question him further ere he left. The baron had not even the consolation of consulting any one. He did not wish to tell everything to his cashier, and had never been in the habit of taking advice from his wife. Besides, Madame Brossin was less able than usual to use the small allowance of good sense bestowed upon her by nature, being greatly disturbed about her son's absence. Alfred had been in the habit of telling her his worries, of asking her for money for his usual foolish frolics, and, in spite of the trouble he gave her, she greatly preferred him to her daughter, who never consulted her, and always did as she pleased. Vergoncey had told the baroness all about the note—so far as he was acquainted with the particulars—about the quarrel and duel. Théodore knew nothing of the forgery however; still what he did know had been quite enough to make the baroness extremely nervous, not to say ill. She began by sending her faithful confidant after Alfred, and Vergoncey had searched for him in every direction, but without any good result.

Madame Brossin now talked of making a complaint at police headquarters, and of pawning her diamonds, so as to raise the money to pay the notes held against her son. Théodore, however, suggested finding the Rue Vanneau money lender again, and once more proposing to give him a mortgage on his famous "property in Gâtinais" as security. The baroness having accepted his proposal, was talking it over, while her husband received Alcamo and Noridet. After dinner, M. Brossin left the table to smoke a cigar on the balcony, and the unhappy baroness went up to him to question him about her son. "Had you brought him up better he would not act like this. It is all your own fault." Such was the consolation which she received.

"He only lives up to his rank, I'm sure," she remonstrated.

"His rank!" exclaimed the baron, raising his hands to heaven. "That is just like a woman! It is a little too much! Do you really think that you have any rank! Do you actually believe yourself to be a baroness?"

"It seems to me that you used to agree with me on these matters," timidly remarked the much afflicted baroness.

"Do you know," said the banker, roughly, "that you are as big a fool as your daughter? Must I remind you that your wealth and your barony came by chance and may go off in the same way? Have you forgotten that you were once merely a housekeeper in the château of a nobleman whose agent I was?"

"Don't speak so loud, my dear, not so loud, our servants might overhear," remonstrated the baroness once more, half stifled by rage.

"If you have forgotten it I haven't, and for that reason, I now request you to let me go and attend to my business."

With these words, M. Brossin went off to his private room where he found M. Bouscareau ready to accompany him upon their night expedition, attired in a long, brown overcoat and a broad-brimmed hat, and having a stick of considerable thickness. In this costume, completed by a collar which resembled a carcanet, M. Bouscareau looked not unlike the leader of some gang of thieves. The evil expression of his face was even more apparent than usual. He was evidently a man ready to do anything to make money, and when the baron looked at him he started back. Moreover, the singularity of Bouscareau's attire made him frown. "It seems to me,"

said he, dryly, "that you might have made yourself look more respectable."

"I am very well satisfied with myself as I am," replied M. Bouscareau, rudely.

His employer shrugged his shoulders, but, although annoyed, he said no more on the matter. He had too many anxieties to wrangle over the subject, and he had too much need of his cashier's help that night to quarrel with him. "You see," said he, sinking into his arm-chair like a man overcome with care, "I was right in not despairing."

"What I see more clearly than anything else, is that you have handed the two thousand certificates of stock over to this count again!"

"Would you have preferred his summoning me to restore them to him?"

"No, I should have preferred it if you had made off to London with the hoard."

"You must be mad! I have no reason for disgracing myself, for I shall receive a million to-night, which will enable me to pay up whatever may be necessary at the end of the month."

"In the first place you haven't yet got the million, and in the next place you may be called upon any day to refund it; if I understand what you told me a little while ago, this fine gentleman doesn't mean to open a regular account with you."

"No, he does not, but he is my friend. If he were not, why should he voluntarily offer me this money? You don't understand," added the baron, scornfully, "anything about the ways of gentle folk."

"That may be. I never have associated with any gentleman but yourself."

M. Brossin's reasons for not quarrelling with his clerk must have been powerful indeed, for he swallowed this insult without complaint.

"Shall I tell you why he so generously offered to help you out of your scrape?" resumed the cashier, returning to the subject of Alcamo.

"I do not ask your opinion on the subject."

"But I mean to give it, all the same. Your count is a cunning fellow, who saw that you are in a muddle, and so as to get back his stock, which he thought in danger, he held you out a bait, which you gulped down. In other words, you have given the substance for the shadow."

The baron turned very pale, and his face clearly expressed the fear that his cashier might be right. "No," he muttered at last, "Count d'Alcamo is incapable of such a trick. He wouldn't do anything so shameful. He has always shown a great interest in me and my family, an interest which was certainly unfeigned, I am sure—"

"Did you ever notice his eyes?" interrupted M. Bouscareau.

"More than you ever did, for you have hardly had a chance to look at him. What's the matter with his eyes?"

"They look like those of a man whom we once knew—a long time ago—when we were young."

"What do you mean by that?" growled the baron.

"Never mind. I shall keep that point to myself, but if you ever suffer from your dealings with this Italian, remember that I warned you."

"While you are about it, why don't you say that he is going to waylay and murder us to-night?"

"I don't know, but I shouldn't be surprised if he did."

"Then you had better stay where you are. I will take my valet with me," said M. Brossin, with vexation.

"Excuse me, I shall go, and I even wish to go, as I am as much interested as you are in knowing what to think of this lender of millions. I'm not afraid of him, for I shall be quite even with him if he attempts to play us any tricks."

"As you like. I only ask you to be polite to a man whose friendship I highly prize."

"Oh! don't be afraid, I shall not open my lips; but if you want me to tell you what I think about his coming, why, I don't believe he will as much as show his face."

"Count d'Alcamo," at this moment announced the office boy in the brown livery, much to M. Bouscareau's discomfiture.

The count came in, fresh, smiling, and lively. His appearance had the effect of brightening up Baron Brossin, who, like his cashier, had begun to think that he would not keep the appointment. "Excuse me, my dear baron," said Alcamo, "for being early. I have a great deal to attend to to-night, and as you are kind enough to accept of the little service I offered you, I am anxious to arrange matters at once."

"You are extremely kind, count," said the baron in a voice full of emotion, "and I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you."

"Pray, let us say nothing about that. I have no merit in obliging you under the circumstances, for, let me tell you, you are realizing one of my dearest wishes."

"I really cannot express—" stammered M. Brossin.

"Come, come," interrupted the count, laughing. "If one of your friends heard you thank me so warmly he might think that I was saving you from some catastrophe." The baron winced. "However," added the count, "it is, on the contrary, only a trifling loan. We Sicilians always feel grateful in exact proportion to the service rendered, and truly, a loan of a mere million to a man like you is a very small affair."

"For an establishment like mine the sum isn't an enormous one, that's true, but you have a way, count, of offering it that doubles its value."

"You insist upon complimenting me, I see. Well, then, let me tell you that I am delighted to oblige one of the richest and most esteemed bankers in all Paris for a few days. It flatters my vanity as a petty citizen from a country of barbarians."

This time M. Brossin bowed without replying. The words "for a few days" had somewhat chilled his enthusiasm, and he had noticed a sarcastic glance given him by his cashier. "Does this gentleman know what we are about to do?" now said the count, looking at Bouscareau.

"Perfectly," replied the baron. "I told him our plans after you left this morning."

"You are then ready to help us in being porters?" asked Alcamo, in a lively tone. This question was addressed to the old clerk, who contented himself with growling a kind of affirmative reply. "Do you know that, to a cashier who is mainly accustomed to handling soft silky bank-notes, lifting all this gold will be a difficult job?" continued the count in the same tone.

"Oh! I have good arms," replied Bouscareau, who, since Alcamo had appeared, had not ceased stealthily examining him.

"I see that, and I sincerely congratulate the baron on having a person like you about him. He tells me that you have been with him for many years."

"Twenty," growled the cashier.

"We are fellow countrymen and friends," said M. Brossin, not sorry for a chance to soothe his surly subordinate.

"Ah, indeed! you are from the same part of the country?" exclaimed the count. "I can understand, then, why you have never parted. In Sicily we have that feeling to a great degree, and people from the same village are apt to cling to one another, and—but excuse me, where were you both born?"

"We were both born in a little town in the west of France, so obscure that you would not even recognise the name if I told it you," hastily replied the financier.

"I am not very well informed as to the geography of your provinces certainly, still I admire with all my heart this twenty years' friendship founded on mutual esteem, for I am sure that Monsieur—Monsieur—"

"Bouscareau," prompted the baron.

"That Monsieur Bouscareau is as much attached to you as you are to him. Ah! fidelity to old recollections is a beautiful trait! I told you, baron, that in my country we always feel gratitude in proportion to the service rendered. That is because we have good memories. We don't forget either good or evil."

"You do yourself injustice, count," said the baron, with a view of being agreeable. "I am sure that you are too generous not to forgive your enemies."

"That is a very Christian precept, but we don't always follow it, I'm afraid."

Alcamo said these words in a tone which would have startled the financier had he been less prejudiced in favour of his noble benefactor. However, the count now hastily changed the conversation, exclaiming as he looked at the superb black marble clock which stood upon the mantelpiece: "It is eight o'clock! See what it is to be in pleasant company! Time passes and one does not perceive it, and I have let myself talk on. We ought to start now."

"We are at your orders, count," said Brossin, eagerly. "I will ring for lights."

It was growing dark and would soon be night. It seemed as though Alcamo had waited purposely to give the signal for departure. "Will you allow me to ask," said the banker, "whether Bouscareau need take any bags to carry away the money?"

"That is unnecessary. My doubloons, as I told you before, are nicely packed in pretty little kegs, each of which holds just four thousand of these handsome coins. Your cashier need only roll four of them to your carriage."

"Three, you mean," muttered M. Brossin, who seemed to be calculating.

"Yes, I think that will be a million or thereabout."

"It is customary to examine gold coins," said Bouscareau, in a rough tone.

"I shall not object to that, my dear sir," said the count, laughing; "you can open the kegs and even weigh the coins if you like. It will give you more trouble, that is all."

The baron gave a reproachful look at his cashier, and made haste to interfere. "Excuse the notions of an old clerk," said he, warmly. "I should never forgive myself for doubting you. You must know, Bouscareau, that twelve thousand doubloons at eighty-four francs make one million eight thousand francs. Besides, the count's word is enough."

"As you please," said the cashier, drily.

"That reminds me," resumed M. Brossin, "that I must give you back eight thousand francs, and a receipt for a million, and I will now—"

"Why now?" interrupted the count, taking hold of M. Brossin's arm as he was about to open one of the drawers of his desk; "you can give me the difference when you receive the million. I am quite of this gentleman's opinion, that regularity is everything in business matters."

"As you please, count."

"Let us go, then, gentlemen. My carriage is at the door."

The baron took up his hat with an eagerness that testified to his ardent wish to be off as soon as possible. Alcamo preceded him through the hall, and the cashier, who was behind, contrived to whisper to his employer the significant words: "If things turn out badly, it will be your fault."

M. Brossin silenced him with an imperious gesture, and they went down stairs without further remark. The count's handsome brougham stood at the door. A coachman, and a footman, each six feet high, sat on the box. The latter alighted as his master appeared, and opened the door of the vehicle. "This is a well-appointed turn-out, count," said the banker, who thought himself a man of taste, "and I congratulate you on your perfect choice."

"It is not my choice, if there is anything to praise. I told you that I hadn't yet had time to get my establishment into proper order, so you see I am obliged to borrow a vehicle from a friend."

"Is it to this same friend's house that we are going?"

"Yes. Oh! he knows how to choose handsome things, and you will admit that when you see his place. I will show it to you from garret to cellar."

While this dialogue was going on, they had all taken their seats in the brougham, which would have held four persons easily. The footman, having shut the door with great care, got upon the box again, and the horses set off at a brisk trot. Bouscarreau had modestly installed himself on the front seat opposite to the baron, who made himself small in order not to be in the way of his opulent companion. "We shall not have a long drive if we go like this," said M. Brossin, in a pleasant tone.

"I hope not, for, as I told you, I have other matters to attend to this evening, and I should like to finish with them."

"Oh, we are quite near the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"My friend does not live in that neighbourhood."

"In the Champs Elysées, then?"

"No, not there either."

"Ah! I remember, you spoke of a large house and an immense park."

"Yes, as he wanted space my friend has gone to live at the other end of Paris."

"A capital idea!" cried the baron, who felt disposed to approve of everything.

"Yes, I think so, indeed. But my friend, I must confess it, is an odd sort of man. You would think that you were in a forest, in some old manor in Anjou or La Vendée. It is all very fine, but very gloomy."

"Still he has the advantage of complete privacy. In our new streets, no matter how much one shuts one's self up, everybody knows all that is going on in one's house."

"I assure you, baron, that my friend has nothing of that kind to fear. All kinds of crimes might be committed in his house, and the neighbours would be none the wiser."



"It must be a nice place for a bandit chief, then," exclaimed M. Brossin, with a hearty laugh.

Alcamo did not say anything in reply, and no one else spoke. The brougham had gone with incredible rapidity along the boulevard and the Rue Royale, over the Place de la Concorde and the bridge of the same name, and was now passing along the quay on the left bank of the Seine. Bouscareau looked out at the window persistently; but his employer only thought of making himself agreeable. "Shall I have the pleasure of being introduced to your friend this evening?" asked he, with unbounded affability.

"Of course, baron, of course! My friend will be delighted to make your acquaintance. He does not often receive calls in the evening, for when a man lives near the Barrière de Fontainebleau—"

The baron let an exclamation of surprise escape him. "What!" he exclaimed, "are we going near the Barrière de Fontainebleau?"

"We are. But why are you so surprised?"

"I did not expect—" began M. Brossin.

"To find a millionaire in that part of Paris? I thought that I just told you that he was an eccentric kind of man."

"That is not what I was thinking of. I was thinking of a strange coincidence. Just fancy, count, one of my friends made an appointment with me, for to-night, in that very neighbourhood, where I have never set foot since I came to Paris."

"What do you say, baron?" cried Alcamo, laughing, "a friend expects you near the Fontainebleau gate? For a prince of finance, you will admit that that is odd."

"Not more so than that your friend should have a château in that part."

"Oh! that is quite different. My friend, in buying his château, looked out for space and open air, two things which cannot be found in fashionable streets; but an appointment at night, in a deserted spot between some tavern and some omnibus office, that looks as though you were courting a 'grisette,' and Madame Brossin, my dear baron, ought to keep her eye upon you."

All this was said laughingly, and yet an observer could have detected a certain amount of anxiety on the count's face. His gay tone, however, did not fail to produce its effect upon the banker, who at once forgot his mistrust. "You are trying to make me seem younger than I am, count," said he, gravely, "and I assure you that 'grisettes' have nothing to do with the matter. It is an unpleasant business, and relates to what I told you with reference to my son."

"Have you been promised some news of your dear Alfred?" said the count, hiding his emotion.

"I have heard something, and my gloomy presentiments were only too well founded. My son is the victim of a plot, laid against him and against me by scoundrels."

"How dreadful! But go on, I pray, you cannot imagine how much I am interested in what you are telling me."

"Yes, count; Alfred has been taken, under pretext of fighting a duel, into a den of robbers, who intend to ask a ransom for him."

"Is it possible? It smacks of my native island. That is the way that things go on in Sicily."

"The fact is that it is unheard of in Paris, and if I hadn't the proof of it, if I didn't know the name of the scamp who has planned all this—"

"What is his name, baron?" interrupted the count; "tell me at once. I long to join you in delivering the captive."

"The brigand's name is Monsieur de Monville, but he does not belong to the ancient family which once possessed the property which I bought in Normandy. He is simply a vagabond from the same place, a poacher and a smuggler, and is trying to revenge himself upon me for having had him arrested for poaching on my grounds."

Alcamo said nothing, and, fortunately for him, the interior of the brougham was not lighted up, for, this time, the look in his eyes would certainly have betrayed him. M. Brossin's story opened an unexpected prospect, and he asked himself how such information, combining truth with falsehood, could ever have reached the baron. "It is the same fellow," now cried Brossin, "who was accused, last November, of having murdered you."

"And who, you told me, escaped. Do you know that all this is frightful? I cannot understand, however, what this incredible adventure has to do with your appointment at the Barrière de Fontainebleau."

"It seems," said M. Brossin, in a solemn tone, "that this man lives near there. The person who told me about it will be waiting for me at midnight to show me the den where my unfortunate son is confined, and enable me to free him."

"I must go with you," exclaimed the count, "and I hope that you will not refuse to let me do so. Monsieur Bouscareau is to go also I presume."

"Of course."

The cashier gave a sort of growl which might pass for an assent. He had not opened his lips since they had started, but seemed greatly interested in following the course of the brougham. They were still going at the same speed, and had already reached the quay of La Tournelle.

"I shall tell my friend," resumed Alcamo, "that there is a den of robbers in his neighbourhood. The deuce! I shall begin to feel uneasy about my little treasure if we don't succeed in freeing the neighbourhood of these scoundrels, without counting the pleasure of finding our dear Alfred again. I presume that you will summon the police to help you to collar these scamps?"

"I don't know. The person who warned me thought that it would be best to say nothing that would cause a scandal, and if it is possible we shall—"

"Do without the authorities? That can be done. My friend will help you if need be, and even without him there will be four of us, counting the person who expects you. Might I venture to ask to whom you owe all this valuable information and help?"

If the banker could have felt the beating of Alcamo's heart, he would have guessed all the importance that he attached to his reply, but M. Brossin was not cunning enough to guess what interest actuated the count. Still less could he guess what were the feelings of the Sicilian noble as regards the nephew of M. de Mathis. "The person who expects me is one with whom you are very well acquainted," replied the baron, without hesitating, "and I am certain that you won't doubt his testimony or distrust his help. It is Monsieur Jules Noridet," he added in the tone of a person making a confidential communication.

"I was sure of it!" thought the count, and he added aloud: "Oh, if that gentleman told you all this, I don't entertain a shadow of doubt about it, and I shall be delighted to act with him. It will, besides, be a good oppor-

tunity to renew my acquaintance with him, for I have not seen him since we stayed together at the Château of Monville. You say that he expects you at midnight?"

"At midnight exactly, in the street."

"That is all right, and we shall have time to move the gold beforehand. I did intend going somewhere else to-night, baron, but I would willingly relinquish my plans to see that dear Monsieur Noridet again. You know that I was always interested in him, and I am glad to learn that he is still on intimate terms with you."

"He came to see me to-day. You almost met him at my office."

Alcamo mentally thanked heaven for having preserved him from the man to whom he did not as yet wish to reveal the fact of his survival. "The project which we spoke about has some chance of succeeding then."

This allusion to the possibility of a marriage between Noridet and Henriette was perfectly understood by M. Brossin, who could not refrain from sighing. At the same time he nudged Alcamo to let him know that he did not wish to speak about Henriette in the presence of Bouscareau, who was now leaning against the door of the brougham and reaching his hand outside.

"What is the matter, my dear sir?" said the count, leaning over to the same side.

"I don't feel very well," growled Bouscareau, quickly withdrawing his hand, with which he had been engaged in feeling for the door-handle.

"Indeed! Would you like to get out? Shall I tell the coachman to stop at a chemist's?"

"No, thank you. No matter," replied the cashier, who would greatly have preferred to get away.

"We shall soon arrive, and at my friend's you can have whatever you wish."

"I do not see any chemist's," remarked the baron, after looking into the street.

The brougham had left the quays, and was rolling rapidly past a high wall, with gates at intervals here and there.

"Is not that the Jardin des Plantes on our left?" said the baron.

"I don't know, indeed," replied the count. "I have never called at my friend's house, except in a vehicle, and I have seldom noticed what we passed on the way. I know that we are coming near, however, for now I remember that fountain."

He pointed to a little fountain in an inclosure in front of a house at the corner of the Rue Cuvier. Bouscareau had ceased wriggling about, and now seemed interested in following his employer's fortunes to the end. He was, perhaps, thinking of running off when the carriage stopped at the door of the house belonging to the count's friend. The baron, on the contrary, seemed gayer and gayer as they drew nearer to the wished-for million. He made no end of polite speeches to which Alcamo now only replied by monosyllables. The two bays seemed to understand M. Brossin's impatience, for they went faster than the famous Russian trotters of the Orloff breed, and the coachman drove them with great skill through many winding streets. Suddenly, however, the carriage stopped before a house of ordinary appearance, and at once passed under an archway, the door of which abruptly closed before Bouscareau had time to alight.

## XXVIII.

"You see, gentlemen," said Alcamo, "that I was right in saying that we had not far to go, for here we are."

"Have we arrived?" asked M. Brossin, not a little surprised at the silence and the darkness.

"Yes; the brougham is stopping, and we can get out."

In fact, after going rapidly under a rather long archway, the horses had stopped near an open iron gate. Bouscareau had not taken his eyes off the door of the vehicle, and, spite of his real or feigned indisposition, he saw everything perfectly well. He realised that any attempt at flight was now impossible. The door of the archway had been closed with remarkable promptness, and the walls around were high. The gigantic footman came to open the door, and the cashier hastily alighted. He was followed by M. Brossin, who now began to feel somewhat uneasy. The count stepped to the ground in his turn, and after a word to the man in livery, he exclaimed gaily: "Well, isn't my friend eccentric? See how lonely it is here? Look at those great trees. One would think that this place was a hundred leagues from the Boulevard Haussmann."

"The fact is," muttered the banker, "that I hardly expected—"

"So plain an entrance? I daresay not, for the buildings around us look like some guard-house or factory. That is another notion of my friend's. He does not wish to be near the street at any point, and his house is over there at the end of the grounds."

"The deuce! the kegs will have a long journey of it," said M. Brossin, endeavouring to jest, "for I suppose that Bouscareau will have to roll them to the carriage."

"Oh, don't be alarmed. The brougham will wait for us at a back door, near the château—for a château it is. You can see the turrets from here, above the pine-trees."

The baron raised his eyes, and was looking at the mass of verdure which barred his view when the rumble of the brougham made him turn his head. The footman had climbed on to the box again, the coachman was whipping up his horses, and the vehicle, after making a wide sweep in the most skilful manner, once more disappeared under the archway. The door opened to allow it to pass out, and then closed again, but no one appeared. M. Brossin found himself alone with his faithful cashier and his noble friend, in a square courtyard, with three outhouses, all of them silent and dark. A low gate separated this courtyard from a park full of trees, which stirred in the faint evening breeze. It was a melancholy picture, to say the least, and the baron thought it perfectly lugubrious. He instinctively drew nearer to Bouscareau who clutched his stick and grumbled to himself.

"Baron," said Alcamo, suddenly, "I'll wager that you are a little bit afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" exclaimed the banker; "what should I fear, count?" And so saying he forced a laugh, but the trembling of his voice belied his assumed gaiety.

"Oh, I don't doubt your courage," resumed the count, "but, with a Parisian accustomed to gaslights, and to the stir of the boulevards, I fancy that this wild place must cause a nervous chill."

"You forget that I am from the country," said the baron, somewhat

reassured. "I was once a thorough countryman, and I assure you that there are plenty of groves where I came from."

"No doubt!" exclaimed Alcamo, with well-affected simplicity, "you did tell me that you came from a village—or were brought up at a—a château, I think you said, in the west of France."

"All this is not attending to business," said Bouscareau, roughly. "I must be at my desk to-morrow at nine, and I don't care to pass the night out of doors."

"Excuse me, my dear sir, we will make up for lost time at once. 'Time is money,' say the English; to-night, time is gold, and Spanish gold, into the bargain."

"Charming! very good indeed!" laughed the baron, but with an immense effort.

"Now I think of it, my worthy Monsieur Bouscareau," asked Alcamo, "what of your indisposition? Has it passed off? I am inexcusable for not inquiring about your health."

"Thank you. The open air has revived me," replied the cashier, roughly.

"Ah! so much the better. Seeing you so strange. I thought that you had suddenly been taken seriously ill. It would have been a bad time, just as the baron needed you to remove the money."

Bouscareau remained as silent as an owl, but stamped impatiently, tapping his cane upon the pavement. "Well, if we are going to take the gold away we have but little time left us," said the baron, "for we have other things to attend to to-night."

"A great many, indeed, baron, a great many, and it is time to set about them. Be kind enough to follow me. I will show you the way."

Going ahead of his companions, the count now entered the park. The banker and his subordinate followed, keeping close to one another; for, in point of fact, they were not at ease. Their guide led them along a tortuous path, bordered with shrubs and thorn-bushes, and walked on rapidly like a person familiar with the place. Indeed, M. Brossin could scarcely keep up with him, and, if he had dared, he would rather have walked more slowly. As for the cashier, who was by no means an active man, he grumbled to himself as much about the baron who had led him into this adventure as about Alcamo, who seemed to him more and more suspicious. The night was not very dark, and for a time they could easily see their way; but, after various turns, they reached a part of the park where the tall trees formed a veritable dome of foliage overhead.

"Count," now said the banker in a tone which revealed his terror, "we are losing sight of you."

"Oh! we are almost there. Don't be disturbed, my dear baron," said Alcamo, without stopping.

Bouscareau now nudged his employer, and said to him in a low tone: "Shall I knock him down? I have my cudgel, and can take a good grip at him as well."

"You are mad! hold your tongue!" replied M. Brossin, in the same tone.

Either the count overheard this short dialogue, or else he was reaching the goal, at all events, he walked still faster and was soon ten paces ahead. Bouscareau, to keep up with him, made as long strides as his legs allowed of, but suddenly he saw him vanish behind a lofty oak. When he came up, panting, to the tree, no one was in sight. "Where has he gone now?" grumbled the irascible cashier.

"Count ! Count !" called Brossin, as loudly as he could, but no one replied. Bouscareau, less patient than his master, unhesitatingly rushed into the thicket, brandishing his cudgel. But he was immediately stopped by the brambles, and pricked his hands so badly, that he began to howl like a wolf in a trap. The baron went to his help, however, and succeeded in freeing him ; but when he had done so and they were again side by side on the path they were no better off, for their guide had utterly vanished, and this evidently premeditated disappearance, on his part, was indeed calculated to alarm them.

"What is the meaning of this ?" muttered M. Brossin.

"It means, by a thousand thunders ! that, thanks to your stupid credulity, we have been fools enough to let ourselves be caught in a perfect trap."

This insulting reply did not rouse M. Brossin to anger. He was so completely bewildered that he could only lean against the oak tree and utter incoherent words. "It is incredible ! it is unheard of !—but no ! the count is my friend—he will return."

"Yes I advise you to wait for him !" replied Bouscareau. "I have no inclination to be dispatched by the cut-throats he has gone in search of, and I am going to try to get out of here."

"We will try together," exclaimed the baron with an eagerness that proved his alarm. "You surely wouldn't desert me here, my dear old comrade."

"Let us be off, then ; but remember, from this moment, I expect to be the master. If you don't obey me as you obeyed the Marquis de Champocé, I shall leave you, and then you can get out of the scrape in the best way you can."

Was it the name that Bouscareau had just mentioned, or was it the fear of remaining alone that acted upon M. Brossin ? At all events he uttered a lamentable groan. "Oh, heavens !" he sighed, following his cashier, "who could have dreamed of such treachery, and with what motive, Bouscareau, with what motive ?"

"You ask me that ?" said the cashier ; "it isn't hard to guess, however, and you had more sense in former times. Don't you understand that this rascally Italian has drawn you here with his million as a bait, having previously recovered his stock, and that he now means to treat you just as your son was treated yesterday ? Don't you see that Monville and he belong to the same gang ?"

"We are lost ! we are lost !" muttered M. Brossin. "What shall we do ? Good heavens ! what will become of us ?"

"Hold your tongue and come on !" said Bouscareau in an imperative tone.

The baron obeyed. He clutched at the skirt of the cashier's overcoat and let himself be led onward. They had not gone twenty paces when they came to a pathway, beyond which there rose up an isolated building. Bouscareau stopped short, and M. Brossin, in terror, seized hold of his arm, and said in a low tone : "Chance has brought us to the château. Let us retreat !"

"That would do no good. Let us stay, on the contrary, and look about us."

The moon had just risen, and by its light, glinting athwart the branches of the trees, one could distinguish the form of the building, so strangely set in this wild wood. Not a sound was to be heard nor was there any light at the windows. "The place seems to me to be deserted," said the cashier,

who added, snapping his fingers: "So much the better! We can hide here until to-morrow morning, and at daylight we shall be able to get out of this place."

M. Brossin no longer listened, however. He was busy examining the château and its surroundings. His eyes wandered from the pointed towers at the corners to the pines which flanked it on the right and left, and he muttered: "What a strange resemblance!"

"What's the matter now?" demanded Bouscareau; "what resemblance are you talking about?"

"Don't you see, over there, that avenue of pines? Look at those pointed towers and those ogival windows, and that pointed roof."

"Well, what of it?"

"Don't you see it is exactly like, like—"

"Like what? You set me wild!"

"The manor of Champtocé," said the baron, lowering his voice still more.

This remark undoubtedly stirred Bouscareau's memory, for he grumbled: "That's true!—those towers and trees; yes—yes—it was like that—over there."

"What in heaven's name can it mean?" sighed M. Brossin.

"Bah! all châteaux are alike."

"No! no! not all. I never saw any like the manor. It looks as though it had been brought here, stone by stone, and built up here again beside those aged pines."

"Come, now, don't let's have any more of that talk," said the cashier, authoritatively. "We did not come here to study landscapes and architecture. We must decide on what we mean to do."

"I have no courage left me to decide," said the baron, in a piteous tone.

"All right! I will decide for you. We will get into this barracks here, somehow or other, and try to find a corner to hide in till to-morrow."

"But that will be running into the lion's mouth."

"Perhaps so, but we have no choice."

"We might try to—"

"To what! to get out of the grounds? That would be madness. The Italian did not bring us here to play blindman's-buff in his park, and he hasn't been mad enough to leave the gates open. If we amuse ourselves in groping about we shall lose precious time, and be found by the robbers, who will soon be here in full force."

"They will find us still more easily in the château."

"That isn't so certain, for it is the last place where they will think of looking for us."

"Suppose we meet them there?"

"It will amount to the same thing, then. Either this place is uninhabited, and in that case we can barricade ourselves inside, or else there is someone inside, and we may meet with a scamp, less rascally than his fellows, and make terms with him. Have you any money about you?"

"I—I don't know," stammered the baron, so frightened that he no longer knew what he was saying. "Ah! yes—I remember that I put a thousand-franc-note in my pocket-book this morning, and I have about ten louis in gold!"

"Good! with twelve hundred francs one can bribe a man. I have something in my pocket-book, too," added Bouscareau, who did not care to specify the amount, "and between us both we shall be awfully unlucky if

we cannot save our skins. The only thing is to come across a fellow of the right sort."

The cashier's reasoning made some impression upon Monsieur Brossin. "So you think," said he, "that these people could be bribed?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Well I don't know why, but I believe there is some revenge in all this, and that the count is not actuated by cupidity."

"Cupidity or not, he has brought us into the same trap as he had already laid for your son, and I see no other way of getting out of the mess."

"My poor Alfred! I had forgotten him," the baron now acknowledged.

"Ah! if I had only listened to Monsieur Jules Noridet!"

Jules's name inspired Bouscareau with a fresh idea. "At what hour were you to meet Noridet?" he asked abruptly.

"At midnight exactly."

"Well it is past ten now, and though I have no remembrance of the roundabout way by which we came, I will venture to say that this park must be near the *Barrière de Fontainebleau*. The best thing for us to do, then, will be to hide in some corner of this building. Meanwhile, the Italian and his gang will search for us through the grounds, and it is likely that in an hour and a half from now they will be tired enough of looking. Then, just at midnight, we can creep out softly and try to find our way to the place where Noridet will be waiting. We must keep close to the wall, and when once we are there, I'll undertake to make noise enough for him to hear us."

"Indeed," muttered M. Brossin, "that seems our only resource, and if you feel sure—"

"I'm not sure of anything, but I think I have said enough. So much the worse for you if you don't think so yourself. I shall leave you where you are and go into the place alone."

The baron found nothing to reply to this ultimatum, and prepared, trembling, to follow the daring Bouscareau. During all this talk nothing had stirred inside the château, and this prolonged silence seemed a favourable sign to the banker. Both of the wanderers advanced with all sorts of precautions under the trees which extended almost to the walls of the deserted house. M. Brossin reflected that if the count had really meant to kill him, he had had time to do so ten times over, and abundant opportunity if he had been concealed in the thickets amid which he had so suddenly disappeared; still for all that the financier was not reassured, but began to think that there was some plot afoot of which he could not understand the purpose. When they had reached the main entrance of the château, Bouscareau stopped to look and listen before entering the open vestibule. The moon had slowly risen above the tree-tops and its rays now fell full upon an escutcheon above the doorway. A shudder ran through M. Brossin's frame. "Look!" he whispered in the cashier's ear, "it is like *Champtocé*!"

"That proves that the architect must have travelled in Anjou," said Bouscareau, sarcastically. "But if we amuse ourselves in scrutinizing all the stones in the building, we shall never find a place to hide ourselves in."

The unhappy baron said no more, still he trembled like a leaf as he followed his cashier up the steps. All within was silent. There were wide gaps in the vaulted walls of the hall, either because the building was not complete or was falling into decay. The daring cashier soon found a



spiral staircase leading to the upper floor, and he was about to ascend it, when suddenly he also observed some steps which led below--no doubt to the cellars of the building. At this sight he no longer hesitated. The retreat below ground seemed to him the safest, so he said in a low tone to the baron: "This is just what we want. We will crouch down like rabbits in a warren, and the devil himself won't be able to find us."

M. Brossin, who was shaking from head to foot, replied: "No, no! I dare not."

"Good-night, then! I am going down," growled the cashier, pulling the flaps of his overcoat from the baron's grasp.

"Don't you remember a spiral staircase like that, and some old steps like these?" persisted his employer.

"That nonsense again?" hissed Bouscareau.

"Yes, this is the way; it is the very way by which we went down into the cellars at Champtocé."

"Enough! enough!" replied the old clerk, who was more disturbed than he cared to admit.

"It was just such a night as this," resumed the baron, shaking with terror. "You remember how the moon shone through the bars of the grating, and you thought that the shade of one of the tall pines in the avenue was the shadow of the old marquis's groom."

The reminiscence was sufficiently out of place to throw the baron's companion into a violent rage. "The devil take you and all cowards like you, as it did your groom and your marquis! You're afraid of ghosts, it seems! Listen! and this is the last thing that I have to say. Will you follow me or will you not? If not, go about your business, and let me get out of all this in my own way!"

"I am coming! I am coming!" groaned M. Brossin, who would have rather followed his companion into Hades than have been left alone.

Bouscareau, without another word, then began to go down, and the banker followed as well as he was able. At the fifth step the two explorers found themselves in utter darkness, which increased M. Brossin's fears; but Bouscareau did not stop, and, after a few moments spent in feeling his way, he found a smooth flooring. They had reached the bottom of the steps. The cashier now extended his hand, and touched some walls of rough masonry. "Let us go on," said he, in a low tone.

"We had better stay here," muttered M. Brossin.

"No, no; it is too near the door."

Indeed gusts of cold air blew in their faces, and a kind of confused buzz occasionally reached their ears.

"Do you hear that?" said the baron, in a low tone.

"I hear the wind in the pines, and I feel it. It shows that there is some other exit from these vaults, and that we had better keep on."

"It is more and more like Champtocé," sighed the baron. "The corridor turned to the right, and the vaults where we found the marquis's gold had an opening, you know, at the foot of the eastern tower."

"Hold your tongue or I'll strangle you!" growled the cashier as they again went on.

They had not gone twenty paces, however, before they came to a wall, against which they almost fell; still on turning aside they found the way clear. M. Brossin had guessed correctly. The corridor turned to the right.

"Look!" said he.

Before them there was a faint light. It was evident that there was still

another turn, and that the light came from beyond the corner. "There—it was there," the baron murmured, "the vault was lighted like that on the night of the 11th of September, and it is the marquis—the marquis himself who now awaits us!"

By way of reply Bouscareau clutched hold of the baron's wrist so fiercely that his nails ran into his flesh. This energetic warning had the effect of making M. Brossin hold his tongue. As they drew nearer to the light the two night-prowlers were able to distinguish various objects. They saw that on their right, on the side from which the inexplicable light appeared, there was a high gap in the wall and Bouscareau thought that the wished-for hiding-place must be there, so he went forward faster than before. On coming to this strange-looking breach, however, he began to think that they had found the place where the Italian stored his treasures. Still it seemed hardly likely that the ill-intentioned nobleman should have made a hole in the wall to remove those famous doubloons in which Bouscareau had but little faith. As for M. Brossin, his mind was altogether occupied with the resemblance of this spot to a terrible scene in his past life, and, in spite of the fear he felt of his accomplice he muttered once more: "The gap, don't you remember? You handled the pick-axe yourself and the marquis's gold—is there."

"If it is we will take it, just as we took it at Champocé," again growled the exasperated Bouscareau. "Let us begin by hiding in this hole, as it is on our way."

Then without caring in the least for M. Brossin, who strove to hold him back, he passed through the breach—but suddenly an unexpected noise made him stop short. A loud sneezing was heard and echoed loudly through the vaulted passage. The baron started as though a bomb had burst at his feet, and clung to the wall with out-spread arms, his mouth open and his hair on end. This time there could be no possible mistake. The vault was inhabited, and it was clear that one or more persons were there. Bouscareau, who at first thought that they had come upon some guardian of the treasure, soon changed his mind.

"God bless you, old man," said some person in a hoarse voice to the individual who had sneezed, by way of congratulating him on not having broken a blood-vessel in doing so.

"We are lost! they are coming!" groaned the baron.

"Hold your tongue and listen! We may, perhaps, be saved."

"I sha'n't be blessed till I'm out of here, and I'd like to be off at once," replied another voice, hoarser than the first which the baron and Bouscareau had overheard.

"You're always as merry as a cricket, Drybones," resumed the first speaker, "but I think that if ever we get out of this den it'll be to take a drive in a prison van."

"That's all your fault. Why did you bring that cursed dandy into the job? If we hadn't been delayed in getting over the wall, we should have had three times as much leisure as we wanted to rob the cellar and bolt with the pile."

"Hold your tongue, you idiot! We should have been in quod yesterday, if it hadn't been for him. Don't you see we are being kept here till papa and mamma come to fetch him!"

"Well, what good will that do us? Sha'n't we have to pay the piper all the same?"

"That isn't sure!"

"And this is a nice hole, ain't it now? Straw, a four pound loaf, and water for those as want a drink!"

"P'raps you'd like to have your dinner brought from the Café Anglais, snobby?"

"Hang it all! if I only had a drop of something stiff to wet my whistle with."

"Just shut it up, that whistle of yours! Do like the dandy who sleeps it off. Just cock your eye on him. Doesn't he look as though he was snoring on a feather-bed?"

"Oh, it's the fright he had, and besides, he hasn't quite recovered from his booze of the day before yesterday; wait till he opens his peepers, and then you'll hear him mew."

This elegant conversation was followed by a spell of silence. The remarks of the hoarse individual had undoubtedly convinced his companion for nothing but snoring was soon heard. The stupefaction of the baron was beyond expression, and even Bouscareau had forgotten the plight they were in. The presence of the two individuals who had been talking slang together, and who complained of being detained as prisoners, their allusions to a recent feat in scaling a wall, and their plans for breaking into a vault—all this was an enigma which the two wanderers failed to understand. Bouscareau concluded, however, that the speakers must be confined, or at all events tied up, and that, consequently, there was nothing to fear from them. He thought that by listening to them, should they speak again, something might be found out, as to the château itself, and so he seated himself upon one of the loose stones, making the baron do the same. He had not long to wait to hear some more, for one of the interesting gentlemen, who had been using the refined language of the galleys, suddenly began speaking again: "There's one thing that sticks in my throat," said he after a noisy cough, "that is, why did the man of this shop let us off, and not blow off our heads with that turning thing of his, that what's its name, you know?"

"His revolver," snorted the other.

"Yes. Why did he fire in the air, instead of breaking our skulls, when he found us in his grounds?"

"He can't know the law! It was a case of lawful self-defence, by night, in an occupied house. I know the code, but those tip-top folks know nothing."

"Well, I think that he had some plan in his head! You saw how the flunkys ran out of every corner to catch us?"

"Yes, and the tall chap who ordered them about, called out: 'Come here, my friends, here they are!'"

"It shows that it was all planned, and they were expecting somebody to stick them in the dark."

"And then what a face the master made, when the servants found the swell spread out under the wall."

"Yes, he laughed, and he rubbed his hands just as we should have done, you and me, if we'd had a chance to run a swell or a bobby into a corner."

"Well, I fancy there's politics in it all, and that we'll get off scot free?"

"Oh, yes! with fifteen years at Cayenne!"

"Pooh! that marquis doesn't care to let the police pry into his affairs."

"Why don't he let us bolt, then?"

"He'll do it! Didn't you hear the old chap, who brought us our

rations yesterday, say : ' You must make this last till to-morrow evening. I shall come back to fetch you during the night? ' "

" Well, it's the night-time now, but that chap doesn't show up. I'm half afraid he means to starve us out."

" No, that can't be ; if he had meant to settle us he'd have done so afore now."

Bouscareau did not lose a syllable of all this, and all his faculties were on a strain to solve the problem which was now gradually growing somewhat clearer. The baron listened with the liveliest interest. He almost forgot his fears, or rather their nature changed, for some of the remarks made by these rascals awoke fresh anxiety in his mind. It was evident that the speakers were in a dungeon or something similar, and it was also clear that their prison was lighted up, and that the light that could be distinguished came from some peep-hole, or from between the bars of a grating. Bouscareau also noted all this, and began to plan the next step he would take. " All the same now," said the husky voice, " I'd like a smoke, but my pipe got broke when I was fighting with the flunkeys."

" It's just like prison, here, tobacco is forbidden ; but I don't care ! To-morrow we shall take the air, and even if we have to deal with the bobbies we'll cheat them, never fear ! "

" Shut up ! you jaw so loud that you've gone and woke the swell, so you have ! "

" Oh ! how I suffer ! " now sung out a piteous voice.

" You've got a leaden cap on, ain't you now ? Well, that's the fault of drink. Oh ! it won't hurt you," sneered one of the burglars.

" Oh ! what a trap I've fallen into ! " resumed the mournful prisoner.

" Oh, if I had only listened to Vergoncey ! "

" Alfred ! it is Alfred's voice," said the baron, who, in an outburst of paternal affection, forgot that Bouscareau had urged him to be silent.

The cashier seized his imprudent employer by the throat, and was still holding him when one of the burglars exclaimed : " Aha ! somebody's coming. Don't be bashful. The cloth is laid. When there's enough for three there's enough for four. Come on ! "

The cashier uttered a frightful oath on hearing this gracious invitation. The conversation which had been overheard was far from reassuring, and Bouscareau realised that the fellows near by were robbers of the worst description. However, Alfred was now heard exclaiming, in melodramatic fashion : " Whoever you may be, come to the help of an unfortunate victim of banditti ! "

" What ! what ! banditti," said the husky villain. " Why do you sneer at us like that, snobby ? "

The baron, who could not endure this, darted to the rescue of his off spring. Bouscareau stooped to take a pickaxe which lay near the gap, and both went forward. A most unexpected sight met their eyes as they turned the corner of the wall. Ten steps ahead, a vault was visible, separated from the passage by a strong iron grating. Those inside could be distinctly seen by the light of a lamp hanging from the ceiling. There was a pitcher of water, some black bread, and some damp straw. The picture presented recalled the fourth act of " *La Tour de Nesle*," with the exception that young Alfred, in no wise, resembled Buridan of romantic memory. Bouscareau at once thought that in these doubtful prisoners of Count d'Aleam he might find auxiliaries, and he did not in the least care about their morals so long as their arms were strong. The

appearance of the banker and his subordinate was hailed with an outburst of cries, and varied observations. Rising up and setting their hideous faces against the grating, the prowlers with whom Alfred had so imprudently made acquaintance at Madame Roubion's, looked like hyenas at the Jardin des Plantes, and the dandy in the corner was not unlike a monkey fallen among wild beasts. "Oh! what a head!" cried out the tall, thin man. "Where did you come from, eh? Have you come with permission for us to get out of here?"

"Don't go into fits," said the short, fat burglar, "it's only some first-class detectives."

Bonscureau was about to address a few feeling remarks to his audience, when the tender Alfred, who had recognised his parent, dragged himself to the bars, groaning: "Papa! papa! save me! save me!"

The baron, in a gush of sensibility, wished to pass his arms through the bars, but his terrible cashier held him back.

"That's right!" sneered the tall, thin man, "don't let him come too near. It isn't allowed to torment the animals."

"Come, now, old chap! what do you want with your brat?" cried out the short, hairy man. "What a lucky scamp he is to have a papa as well-off as you!"

These objurgations might have lasted much longer in the same style had not Bonscureau undertaken to cut them short. "Hold your tongues! I only want you to stop your noise and tell me whether you want to get out of this place or not."

"Get out? I should say we did! We are expected this evening in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, at a swell party," replied the thin burglar, who was of a facetious turn of mind.

"Speak up!" said the other, "we'll answer you because you look like a good-natured chap, so you do."

"Who shut you up in here?" demanded the cashier.

"What a question!" sung out both of the scamps at once. "Why, the master of the place, a tall chap with a solid fist of his own and fiery eyes."

"Dark, broad-shouldered, with white teeth?" said the baron.

"Just so, Fatty."

"Good! it must be the count," muttered Bonscureau. "What were you going to do?"

"Break in, of course. Do you think that we run the risk of Cayenne merely to 'pick cherries?'"

"Where did you find this young man?"

"Find him? It was he that came to fetch us to tell us where to find the 'shiners.' It seems the master of the house is his friend, for he knew the right spot, so he did."

"It isn't true; they brought me here by force," groaned the unlucky Alfred.

"What! do you dare to say that this lad is your accomplice?" asked the cashier, determined to get at the truth.

"A little bit, as you say. If he hadn't told us, we should never have known that there was a vault full of gold in this place here. I don't visit in society, you see, and the owner here had always forgotten to invite me to call."

"He lies! he did know!" cried Alfred; "he took advantage of my condition; he made me drink, and—"

"Hold your tongue, or I'll hit you!" called out the tall, thin man, with a threatening gesture.

The baron was suffering the pangs of hell itself. His misfortunes exceeded all the horrors he had ever dreamed of. To find his son compromised in a burglary was too much. The wretched Alfred in vain protested his innocence, for his father, now knowing the facts as to the forgery, did not believe a word he uttered. "He must have been trying to get at this Monville's money, in order to find means to pay those notes. First forgery—then theft! One follows the other!" thought M. Brossin.

Bouscareau, who had always felt an utter contempt for Alfred also believed him guilty of the attempt at robbery. "You lot of tattlers!" said he, as much to the baron and his son as to the robbers, "do you think that we have time to wrangle? One more question," he added. "Has any one come here since you were put in confinement?"

"No one," replied the tall, thin man; "but the old fellow who thrust in our rations will surely show himself here to-night, for he told us that we should only stay twenty-four hours."

"If he comes we will receive him," growled Bouscareau; and, taking his trembling employer aside, he began to lecture him in energetic terms. "We can now, perhaps, atone for your folly, but on conditions that you will show some courage. No sneaking and crying, or lamenting. You must help me to let these men out, and they will help us to get away."

"Are you crazy?" said M. Brossin. "Do you mean to become these fellows' accomplice?"

"This is a little too much! Go to the devil with your scruples!"

"But, you foolish man, they are escaped convicts, and if we are arrested with them what shall we say to justify ourselves?"

"What will your son, Alfred, say when he is found with them?" The baron's answer was a groan. "Listen to me, now, instead of sighing like a woman," added Bouscareau. "We are in a scrape, it is true, but five men may get out where two might fail. These fellows can easily find the place where they scaled the wall. They will hoist us up, and besides, your Monsieur Noridet must be waiting, and will help us. When once we are outside we will bid good-bye to these galley-birds, and go off with your fool of a son, who otherwise would come to trial."

"But, then," said the baron, already partly convinced, "what if we meet Count d'Alcamo and his servants?"

"Well, then, we will fight them, and I will undertake to make noise enough to make anybody who is outside hear me."

"Now, then!" called out the tall, thin man, who was beginning to tire of this "aside," "haven't you done jabbering away there?"

"What am I to do?" said M. Brossin, in a low tone.

"You must help me to break away the grating. I will knock at it with my pick-axe, and you must pull at the bars, and the prisoners will lend us a hand."

The baron made no further objection, and Bouscareau set to work.

"That's the style, old 'un!" said the squat man, at every blow of the axe, which the cashier handled with uncommon vigour. M. Brossin helped him, and both were too busy to look behind them. Suddenly, however, a person, who appeared at the corner of the passage, exclaimed in a grave voice: "Monsieur le Marquis is waiting for his people in the red-room."

At the sound, M. Brossin, who was less occupied than his cashier, turned round and found himself face to face with an old man, dressed in a green

coat, with a red lining, and having a cocked hat upon his head. High boots and a doeskin vest completed this old-fashioned attire. With his meagre, carefully shaven face, his sunburnt skin, and his lofty stature, which was beginning to be somewhat bowed by age, this singular personage looked like some old groom ready to mount on horseback and accompany King Louis XV. on a stag-hunt. This type of the old *régime* might have caused a smile on the Boulevard des Italiens; but the banker, baron though he was, or perhaps because of his barony, displayed the most abject terror on perceiving the old man. Instead of walking up to this strange apparition, M. Brossin staggered back to the grating, covering his sorry offspring with his own form, and spreading out his arms as though to ward off a ghost. Bouscareau now also turned and caught sight of the new-comer. Less appalled than his employer by the antique aspect of the vision, he at once thought of getting rid of a dangerous witness, and rushed at the old man with his axe raised. "Down with him! he is at the head of the gang!" called out both of the thieves, who were stamping about in their cell.

The man in the green coat did not stir an inch. He did not even make a motion to defend himself. He simply put a silver whistle to his lips, and gave a long call. At this signal, four tall footmen, in a dark livery, turned the corner. They quietly gathered about the groom, who seemed to be their superior, and Bouscareau saw that they carried long, thick staves. His axe, although solid and sharp, could not avail him against such a numerous party, so he lowered it as if in token of surrender.

"The marquis is waiting," now said the groom in a calm voice. He was as imperturbable as ever. This time Bouscareau heard him, and a cloud passed before his eyes, while suspicion rose within him, for he fancied he could recollect the old fellow's costume.

Meanwhile, however, the tall scraggy burglar suddenly let go of the grating, and sunk into a corner, saying: "We've nothing to do with all those 'aristos' doings." As he turned away, however, he disclosed the light, which now streamed from the lamp, upon the old groom's face.

"Bernard!" exclaimed the terrified cashier; "Bernard, the marquis's groom!" and he added: "No—it can't be, I must be going mad!"

"I told you that I was not mistaken in saying I had recognised the Manor of Champtocé," muttered the baron.

However, Bouscareau knew very well that the Manor of Champtocé was far from Paris, and that the last lord of the place had followed his ancestors to the tomb. He therefore did not believe in the summons uttered by a representative of a long buried past. Besides, he said to himself that, in 1868, in the capital of the civilized world, people could not be spirited away as in the Middle Ages. He believed in policemen, and not in men of arms. "We are not to be duped by this ridiculous masquerade," said he, resolved to brave the matter out, "and we are not afraid of you although you may be Bernard."

He had spoken for the baron as well as himself, but the latter looked completely cowed, and did not dare to speak.

"I have orders," resumed the groom, "to bring the steward Jacques Brossin, and the clerk François Bouscareau before the marquis."

"And I order you to set us at liberty at once," cried the cashier. "We have been entrapped to witness I know not what farce, and I think that the joke has lasted long enough. Come! take us out of this cut-throat's hole and open the door that leads into the street. If you will do that we will agree not to enter a complaint for sequestration and threats."

The baron listened with his mouth wide open, and was astounded at his clerk's audacity. He even had a gleam of hope, for he did not understand the old fellow's strange interference. His hope did not last long, however. "The marquis ordered that these men should be brought, willingly or not," said the groom, quietly, to his assistants, who at once stepped forward with a threatening air.

All Bouscareau's daring disappeared at once. He threw aside the axe to show that he yielded, but he still thought of trying some trick, as open resistance was no longer possible. "Go, papa, go! and ask them to let me out!" groaned Alfred, throwing himself upon his straw again.

The foolish young dandy had no need to beg his father to submit, for M. Brossin had no intention of doing otherwise. Stunned by all that had happened, he no longer tried to reason, but let himself be borne along by the tide of events, like a swimmer who yields to the current that is bearing him away, without knowing whether the waves will swallow him up or cast him upon the shore. "We will follow you," said he to the old groom.

"Come, then!" said the latter.

"So be it!" said Bouscareau; "I yield to force, but I protest."

"Hullo!" said the tall, thin man; "that chap must be a lawyer."

The cashier walked first with his head erect, and a bold expression on his face, while with one arm he supported M. Brossin, who was unable to sustain himself. The groom followed with his companions, and if Noridet could have seen this procession he would have shuddered at the sight of one of his victims of whom he thought himself forever rid. M. Bernard, although greatly altered, was now in full possession of his reason.

"Good-bye, my friends; good luck to you!" remarked the tall scraggy burglar in a mocking voice. Alfred groaned. The party walked along the corridor, one of the servants took up a lantern which he had left round the corner, and by its light M. Brossin saw an immense iron chest beyond the gap in the wall. This chest, no doubt, recalled some painful remembrance, for he sighed as he turned away his eyes.

"Anybody would think that we were going to execution," said Bouscareau, forcing a laugh.

No one replied, however, and as he halted a moment, he felt the old groom pushing him on. Up to that moment he had only protested, and had not alluded to the past. He now thought, however, that the time had come for adopting another tone, for he abruptly remarked, "I suppose Bernard, that you get well paid for playing this trick on your old friends?"

"Go on!" drily replied Bernard.

"I know him, your Italian!" continued Bouscareau in the same tone, "and I don't believe all the stuff you are telling me. The old marquis went his way long ago, and unless your Alcamo has taken his succession by buying it—"

"Go on!" said the groom.

This time Bouscareau realised that he might as well be silent. As for the baron, he was much too frightened to speak. So it was in profound silence that they crossed the hall and went up the spiral stairs. "Where are they taking us?" said Bouscareau to himself, and still thinking of getting away.

He had a vague hope of being led across the park, and promised himself that he would then call for help with all his might; but Bernard, who was at the head of the procession, barred the doorway, and both the baron and the cashier were forced to climb to the first floor where they



reached a landing, and a high oak door, which the groom opened with a key. "Go in!" said he, letting the two prisoners pass in first.

M. Brossiu hesitated. He felt as though he were entering a torture-chamber. "Come!" said Bouscareau, with an air of bravado, "if the fiend is inside, we shall see how his horns are shaped," and he walked in with a deliberate step. The baron, partly of his own will and partly urged by Bernard, followed, and then the door was closed.

The chamber to which they had been conducted, was lighted by a large silver lamp, suspended from the ceiling above a long table covered with a black cloth. No one was there, and fright changed to surprise. Bouscareau himself could not refrain from expressing his astonishment at finding himself in this apartment, which, with its antique woodwork and dark hangings, looked not unlike a court room. This resemblance was completed by the furniture. A large, high arm-chair had been placed at the end of the room behind the great table, in front of which two stools were set. Bouscareau glanced round him for a means of escape, but the door by which they had entered was closed and guarded outside no doubt, while the only window had very strong shutters, secured by an iron bar, and a pad-lock—so that flight was quite impossible. Bouscareau was about to indulge in a fit of rage, when suddenly his eyes lighted on the two portraits which Noridet had gazed at on the preceding night. He now turned very pale, and trembled violently as he drew near to examine them. The light of the lamp fell full upon the figure of the old noble, and the cashier recoiled as though he had indeed seen his former master. When M. Brossin saw his subordinate show such unequivocal signs of terror, he in his turn began to examine the portraits, and when he had done so, he groaned: "It is all over! We are lost!"

"Why are we lost?" asked Bouscareau, trying to appear unconcerned.

"Do you not see? It is he!"

"The old marquis and his mother, too. I see them, but what does that prove?"

"They were at Champtocé, those pictures, in the red room."

"Yes, the hangings are all here, too. They must have been brought here."

"Don't you wonder why this room has been arranged in this way, like the room in the manor on the day when the young master—"

"That's enough! I don't wish to hear about the young master. We have not had any master for a long time, thank Heaven! I do not see in the least why all this phantasmagoria arranged by this Italian should scare us, and I am not fool enough to pay any attention to it."

"But you saw Bernard."

"Well, what of that? I never supposed that he was dead."

"I hoped that he was," said the baron in a low tone, "for nothing more was heard of him after he left the manor with the old marquis; and when I saw him just now in his old dress, he seemed like a spectre to me."

"I don't care for spectres. Let me only be rid of those four great lanky fellows who came here with us, and—"

"I remember, now," sighed M. Brossin, "that this very Bernard came last autumn to Monville with Count d'Alcamo, and his face did not then seem familiar to me. He had to appear in his former attire for me to recognize him."

"What, is Bernard in the service of this Italian?" asked Bouscareau, eagerly.

"Yes; he called him his steward, but there are so many Bernard's in France that I paid no attention to the matter. Besides I barely saw him."

"But didn't you tell me that he was accused of having murdered his master?"

"Yes,"

"Well, then, I am beginning to see into all this. Alcamo must have met him when he was poor, in London; and Bernard, no doubt, told him a pack of stuff about Champtocé and the treasure; and as all these Italians are intriguers, he laid a plot to get some money out of you. This is all pure blackmail."

"How can he get any money from me, now that I am ruined?"

"He doesn't know that. He has joined this Monville in the matter. They are all in the same gang."

"Yes, I see," said M. Brossin, in a low tone. "They began with Alfred! Who knows whether they did not set a trap for him and entangle him in this business of the burglary?"

"Of course."

"Still, all this does not make it any the better for us."

"Not now. But it will to-morrow."

"What shall we do?"

"You'll see presently that a proposal will be made to you to buy back your own liberty and your son's honour and your own for a sum of money, two or three millions, perhaps; for you are believed to be immensely rich. Make some demur, for form's sake, but sign whatever they ask you to sign. You must do that, and we shall then be free, and the fellow who will be taken in," added Bouscareau, in a low tone, "will be the Italian himself."

"If I could only believe that!"

"Believe it or not, as you like, but don't lose your head again and spoil everything. I tell you that you must screw up your courage, make more fuss than they do at first, and then yield, little by little, like any father who would rather make a pecuniary sacrifice than see his son's name compromised. That is what you must do."

"Yes," replied M. Brossin, slowly, "you are right. I feel that I can struggle with these people as to what concerns Alfred. There is but one thing which puzzles and frightens me."

"What is that? Deuce take it, what is that?" demanded Bouscareau, impatiently.

"If the count speaks of what took place at Champtocé after the death of the marquis, what shall I say then?"

"You mustn't deny that we were both of us in the old man's service. It would be unskilful to do that, as Bernard must have told him of it. You will even have a fine chance to talk about your honesty and labour in the past, and you must say that you came to Paris in wooden shoes, which always has a good effect."

"Yes, but the rest?"

"The rest he will either say nothing about, or if he does, it will be to find out what you will say, for Bernard saw nothing himself, and he can only have told his master what was said in those parts. You must oppose scornful silence and dignity to his assertions, and play the part of a man who won't stoop to answer absurd slanders. If you do as I tell you, I'll answer for it that the Italian will have got up all this spectacle for nothing,

and he will feel sorry that he spent so much money to have all these old goods and chattels brought from Champtocé."

"I really think that I shall be able to get out of all this," replied M. Brossin who now felt quite encouraged.

He had scarcely spoken, however, when a singular phenomenon took place. The lamp suddcely went out and the room was plunged in darkness. Darkness is always full of terror to the guilty, and both Brossin and Bouscareau trembled. All at once as they gazed about them, longing for a ray of light, the opposite wall seemed to become illuminated. Indeed a panel had slid back and the banker and the cashier now gazed upon a strange sight. They saw, as it were, an inner room—a sleeping room—as through a kind of haze—and in this room, on a bed, the muslin curtains of which were drawn back, there lay a young girl with a pale haggard face. She was sleeping.

"Henriette!" cried the banker, recognising his daughter; and he would have sprung forward, but the table impeded his progress, and ere he could reach the wall, the panel had slipped into its place again, the lamp hanging from the ceiling was relighted by invisible means, and all trace of the apparition passed away.

M. Brossin was in a state of intense emotion, and Bouscareau was greatly surprised, for he was not aware of Henriette's flight from the paternal roof. He now plied his employer with eager questions which Brossin answered as soon as he had recovered a little self-possession—dwelling on the strange circumstances of Henriette's flight, her supposed intimacy with Noridet, and his surprise at now finding her in Alcamo's power. The two confederates were still pondering over the meaning of all this, Bouscareau expressing his conviction that the Italian had decoyed Henriette away, when suddenly the door of the room was flung noisily open, and Bernard, the groom, appeared upon the threshold and announced:

"Monsieur le Marquis Albert de Champtocé!"

## XXIX.

THIS name fell like lightning upon the prisoners. They made but one rush to the end of the red room. At the sound of Bernard's ringing voice all their hopes seemed suddenly to vanish, and instead of thinking of signing some treaty with their powerful enemy, they thought only of defending themselves against dangers which Bouscareau's cunning had failed to foresee.

The groom having announced his master by name now preceded him. Behind him came the four men in dark liveries. They stood on the right and left of the door and waited in grave silence for half a minute. Then a naval officer in full uniform strode into the room. He slowly passed the servants, turned round the table, scarcely glancing at the trembling banker and his cashier, and seated himself in the arm-chair like a judge. Scarcely had he done so than Bernard, who seemed to be the usher of this audience, made a sign to the servants to retire and to close the door. M. Brossin now drew a long breath. It was clear that violence would not be resorted to, at least for the moment, and that a war of words was more likely to take place. This was in accordance with his conjectures, and hope returned to his heart, as he said to himself that he would follow Bouscareau's suggestions.

"Jacques Brossin ! François Bouscareau !"

These names uttered by Bernard, made the accused start—for the banker and the cashier were now certainly in the position of accused parties—and the groom added a significant gesture to his call. There was no chance for resistance, and Brossin as well as Bouscareau seated themselves upon the wooden stools in front of their judge. The groom, in his turn, then took a chair at the end of the table.

The naval officer remained for a moment leaning on the table with his head in his hands. He was evidently reflecting. At first neither the baron nor the cashier dared to stir ; but eventually the latter took courage and began. "Come, sir, we have been marched about by your lackeys for the last hour or more, and have been treated to exhibitions that might serve to frighten a child but not us. I presume that this farce is about to end." The person whom Bouscareau thus addressed did not stir, however. "The devil take it !" cried the cashier, growing bolder and bolder, "I don't mind a joke, but I think the shortest are the best. Let us have an end to these private theatricals." This time there was still no reply. Bernard moved, but the stranger kept still. Bouscareau accordingly thought that he might as well change his tone, and he said, insinuatingly : "Come now, sir ! we have not been brought here for nothing. If there is anything serious in all this, tell us what it is, so that we may know what to think. There is always some understanding to be arrived at with honest people. Have you any proposal to make ? Explain yourself. Would you like to talk ? Then let us talk. It seems to me that with business people, one—"

However, the cashier's eloquence was abruptly brought to a close. "Jacques Brossin, do you recognise me ?" said the naval officer slowly. He had raised his head, and the light of the lamp now fell upon his face.

The baron, who had been looking piteous indeed, and who had held down his head while his cashier had been wasting his time protesting, now started up as though the trump of judgment had sounded. He looked for the first time at the bearer of a name which he had his reasons for fearing, and he remained mute with amazement. It was Count d'Alcamo who sat before him, but Count d'Alcamo younger, and as though transfigured. In his naval uniform his figure appeared more slender, and his marked features also seemed to have softened. The lines below his eyes, for instance, had disappeared, like those around the corners of his mouth, formed by the habitual contraction of a sneer. It seemed to M. Brossin as if he saw another face, formerly familiar, but long since forgotten. Gradually, however, remembrance returned. Troubled, hesitating, and bewildered, the baron gazed at the uncertain likeness of one whom he believed to be dead.

The naval officer took off his gold-banded cap, and curling locks of dark wavy hair fell over his wide forehead, which now seemed to have no more wrinkles upon it. M. Brossin uttered a cry of terror. The apparition lived ; the phantom was indeed a man. "Have I changed so much that for an entire year you have taken your master's son for a stranger ?" asked the officer, quietly.

M. Brossin hid his face in his hands and was unable to utter a word. Bouscareau had turned livid, and was gnawing his finger-nails. "I wore this uniform on the day when you saw me for the last time, Jacques Brossin, did I not ?" The banker's only reply was a groan. "You remember that day ?" resumed the officer in a ringing voice. "You remember the oath which you took before the judge, who hesitated to pronounce your master's son an impostor when he claimed the inheritance left him by his father ?

You remember having driven forth and dragged to prison the man whose bread you had eaten for thirty years?"

"No, no," murmured M. Brossin, while Bouscareau ground his teeth and dashed his fist upon the table.

"Your memory is treacherous, baron," said the officer coldly, "you oblige me to tell you your own history. My name is not Count d'Alcamo, but Albert Louis André, Marquis of Champtocé. Listen, Jacques Brossin to your master's son."

The unhappy banker shook in every limb, but the cashier was calmer. This was not because his conscience was any clearer than that of his employer, but this threatening exordium was not addressed to him, and he argued favourably from the voluntary or accidental omission of the name of Bouscareau.

"I can see it now," resumed Albert de Champtocé; "that plain in Brévans, where my father met a little beggar boy dying of cold and hunger."

On hearing this M. Brossin shook from head to foot.

"I was still but a child; but I often went hunting with my father, and we had just run down a wolf. Night was falling, and we were returning to the manor. The beggar boy was crying as he lay on the side of a ditch. He did not belong to the country, and the mountebanks who had brought him with them had abandoned him, because they could no longer feed him. He did not know who his parents were. Shortly after his birth his mother had left him in a field where these gypsies had picked him up."

The baron was not trembling now, but weeping.

"My father alighted from his horse, took up the lad, wrapped him in his cloak, set him across his saddle and brought him to Champtocé. Eight days later the little beggar boy was the pet of the manor, and the marquis already planned making a man of him. He sent him to the priest to be taught, and it was not lost time, for the vagabond showed great facility for learning. Natural intelligence is a great gift, is it not, baron?" The banker's only reply was a lamentable sigh. "Well, the child grew in strength and learning, and, on leaving the worthy priest who had taught him, he was a fine, handsome young man, who was as well adapted to be a brave soldier as an able clerk; but he had no inclination to be a warrior, and, on the contrary, he showed a great aptitude for mathematics. Besides, the marquis had grown so fond of him that he would not allow him to become a conscript, but procured a substitute in his place, and made him his steward. That was a capital school for studying finance, Monsieur Brossin."

"I know all that I owe to the marquis," groaned the unhappy baron.

"Ah! he became a model steward," resumed the officer, "and his master was so well satisfied with his services that he ended by letting him have the entire management of his affairs. This, it is true, he was forced to do. The Revolution of 1830 threw the Marquis of Champtocé into all the chances of partisan warfare. A revolt in La Vendée and Anjou took place, and I followed my father who was at the head of our peasantry. It was then that the fidelity and devotion of the faithful steward were put to the test, and, of a certainty, neither he nor I have forgotten the night of the 11th of September, 1832."

This date must have brought very painful remembrances to M. Brossin's mind, for the distress which he had been unable to disguise since the beginning of this narrative now gave way to utter prostration. He hung his

head like a criminal whose sentence is being read and he had no strength to protest.

"My father," continued Albert de Champtocé, "thought of taking his faithful Jacques with him, for he believed him to be brave and true. The whole household went with him, and Jacques complained of not sharing his employer's danger. It was I who opposed his going, for some one was needed at the manor to watch over our interests. Jacques accepted the mission which was confided to him, and fulfilled it intelligently. Never had the rents from our farms been paid with more regularity than when he alone had charge of the domain. We were always lenient with our peasants, but he was pitiless, and my father was more than once obliged to temper his zeal."

"He had good reasons for making the farmers pay," now muttered Bernard.

"Jacques rendered us many other services," resumed Albert. "In the wandering life which we led, obliged to hide in the forests, and tracked by the soldiers, we needed a confederate to tell us of the enemy's movements, and, sometimes, even a trustworthy man to send us provisions; for very often, in spite of the devotion of the people around, we needed bread. Towards the close of the insurrection, the worthy people of the district were so closely watched by the detachments which were beating up the country, that communication with us became very difficult. It was then, especially, that ingenious Jacques discovered un hoped-for resources. It was impossible for him to leave the château, but he had with him a very intelligent assistant."

Bouscareau now started, but tried to look unconcerned. Since the marquis had begun his narrative, the cashier had passed from hope to fear, alternately, but the turn matters had taken had so far not been disagreeable to him, for his employer alone had been mentioned; however, the last words uttered by M. de Champtocé suddenly disturbed his security, and he made a frightful grimace in spite of himself. "Jacques had found that this assistant—the son of a poor farm servant, who began life as a swineherd—had aptitudes almost equal to his own; so he undertook to form and instruct him. He had perhaps discovered in his unpolished nature a certain likeness to his own character; or he may have interested himself in him simply as a lad who was poor and an orphan like himself. It is certain, however, that he let him profit by the lessons which he himself received from the priest; and my father, pleased at this brotherly feeling, took François from the pig-sty and placed him with the steward."

Bouscareau had now turned green, and did not dare to raise his eyes. Brossin, on the contrary, breathed more freely, and was certainly not sorry to see that his cashier was getting his share of the blame.

"It was this François, then," resumed M. de Champtocé, "that Jacques chose as his secret emissary, and for several months he came every night to bring us useful information. He had a special talent for tracking the soldiers, or, rather he took good care to get into their good graces by rendering them a thousand little services, and, thanks to his cunning in this way, he went everywhere about the country. My father had such absolute confidence in him that he did not order any movement of his little band without consulting François. This young peasant, whom our enemies did not mistrust, told us in what copse we might bivouac without danger, and at what cottage we might find provisions without fear of meeting the soldiery. Well, we had been a year going about the country, and the

summer of 1832 was coming to a close. The affairs of our party were in a bad state, and almost all the leaders of the movement had already submitted. Still my father was not yet disheartened. He hoped to open a passage with his handful of men and gain the British coast. This meant exile, and probably ruin ; but it was better than being captured, tried, and sentenced as a rebel. The marquis was responsible for many lives, and he wished to save the brave men who had followed his fortunes from the scaffold. He therefore made arrangements for leaving the country. It was necessary to reach a farm-house where some friends would have disguises ready for us so that we might reach Nantes in safety. We hoped, when there, to find a means of reaching England, but the most difficult point of all was to get to the farm, as there were flying columns all over the country. Well, my father, as usual, sent out François as a scout, and, one evening, he came to tell us that the coast was clear. He had seen, he said, the rear-guard of the troops going off in the direction of Bressuire, and we had all night before us to reach a place of safety."

"The wretch lied !" muttered Bernard.

"The marquis resolved to profit by this unhopcd-for respite, but he did not wish to go off without giving final instructions to his faithful steward. We were encamped in a wood, at a league, at the furthest, from the manor. At nightfall my father left his little troop, after giving orders that the start should take place at midnight, when he would return. He took me with him, and, thanks to our thorough knowledge of the district, we reached Champocé without any mishaps. It was on the night of the 10th to the 11th of September, and I suppose, baron, that long ago as it is, you remember it as though it were to-day ?"

M. Brossin raised his head and tried to articulate a few words, but his emotion choked him, and he did not succeed in making any distinct reply.

"I," resumed Albert, "can still see the red room where my father was received by his faithful steward. He seated himself in his arm-chair, at the place where I now sit, and I went to the end of the table where you are, Bernard."

"Yes," muttered the groom, "I was watching at the door of the château."

"The marquis conformed to old customs, and those who were in his employ never sat in his presence ; still, that night he bade Jacques sit down in front of him as you sit in front of me, baron ; and François, who, by his zeal, had won the right to be present at this last interview, had permission, also, to sit beside his friend, just as you, Monsieur Bouscareau, sit beside your employer. Well, my father knew that his departure would involve the loss of all our property, for it was certain that he would be sentenced when absent, and that the expenses of the suit would literally eat up all the money from his estates. He had thought of making a fictitious transfer to his steward, who would have been a kind of trustee, and have saved us from ruin ; but Jacques respectfully remarked that such an act would certainly be declared null and void, for it was well known that he, a poor foundling, had no money with which to buy the domain and the manor house. The marquis yielded to these representations, and looked on his steward's refusal only as a fresh proof of the zeal with which he espoused our interests. Time was wanting to think of some other plan, for every moment's delay might cost the life of all concerned in the enterprise, and my father soon made up his mind. 'To sacrifice a fortune 'for the king's sake' was not a new thing in our family, and, besides, we had one last resource,

although a small one. At the outset of the insurrection, and in view of an unfortunate result, the marquis had held some gold in reserve. He possessed a thousand Spanish doubloons which had been left him by a relative who had fallen in the service of Ferdinand VII."

This stroke went direct to the heart of Monsieur Brossin, who started convulsively.

"Well, this treasure was hidden in a vault which my father had had walled up, and which was below the eastern tower; you knew it well; it was the one at the end of the avenue of pine trees." The baron groaned again, but found no reply. "Of all our servants," said M. de Champtocé, "Bernard was the only one who knew of the existence of this deposit, and he was about to follow us to England. We could not think of taking this gold with us, for the whole night would have been consumed in opening the vault, and we could not burden ourselves with so great a weight. So the marquis did not hesitate. He believed in the fidelity of the two men whom he had raised from misery, and he told them his secret. Jacques received his instructions, which were to take away the treasure, in case the château was sold, and to keep it until his master came to claim it. 'If I knew anyone more honest than you are,' said my father to him, 'I should choose him to watch over the only patrimony which remains to the last of the Champtocé's.' Jacques, moved to tears, swore to die rather than suffer this sacred deposit to be taken away from him."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Bernard. "Ah! if the marquis had only listened to me!"

"Do you not agree with me, baron?" resumed the naval officer; "Jacques kept his oath, didn't he, for he never gave the gold to anyone, not even to his master?"

"He could not give back the gold, as he had not taken it," cried M. Brossin, without perceiving that he was almost making a confession in his agitation. "Everybody round about knew what took place at Champtocé on the night when the soldiers—"

"Yes," interrupted the marquis, "the night of the 11th of September. I see with pleasure, baron, that your memory is returning to you. Let me finish my narrative, so as to recall everything to your mind."

Bouscareau did not wince, but, while his employer was thus unskilfully defending himself, he was thinking as follows: "Let him abuse Brossin as much as he likes, that doesn't concern me. I wasn't at Champtocé when he came back to claim his hoard, and, as for the rest, it wasn't seen or heard, so there is no one to reveal it."

"I must tell you now," resumed Albert, "what befell our expedition, undertaken in good faith on the information given us by François. Our men awaited us at the woods of La Houssaie, and before midnight we had joined them. Everything seemed to favour the flight of our little corps. The night was dark and rainy, and in such weather we hoped to find the roads free. My father had a few hundred louis in his belt, and this would pay for our passage to England and that of our brave peasants. Two hours to reach the farm where our friends awaited us, with disguises, and then we should be safe."

"The road was long and bad," grumbled Bouscareau, who had recovered enough composure to put in a word.

"We were not even able to attempt following it," continued Albert, "for, before quitting the bivouac, at the moment when our little troop



were taking up their guns, we were vigorously attacked by an entire battalion of infantry."

"By three companies only," said the cashier.

"So be it! You are better informed than I am, it seems. The struggle was certainly a very unequal one. Every outlet from the wood was closed, and the leader of the detachment must have been marvellously well informed, for not one of our men escaped. Those who were not killed upon the spot were taken prisoners, and many of them expiated their attachment to their leader at the galleys. Fidelity is a very foolish thing, is it not, baron?" M. Brossin said nothing, but his state of mind was very evident from his face. "In the midst of all this," resumed M. de Champtocé, "my father showed himself worthy of his race. He fought on heroically to the end, and when all further resistance was impossible, he succeeded in guiding me through almost impenetrable thickets. Before daylight we were in safety."

Bouscareau ground his teeth, and said to himself: "That is what came of my not doing the work myself."

"We were saved; but our enemies thought that we had fallen, and on the morrow there was a rumour, from Angers to Nantes, that the last chief of the insurrection had fallen, pierced by three bayonet wounds, and that his son had had his shoulder shattered by a bullet. Their bodies were not found, but were supposed to have been buried by night by pious hands. The faithful steward and the zealous François shared this belief, and I leave you to imagine, baron, what tears they shed for their master."

"Anybody in the department could prove that they mourned for him."

"Yes, these excellent servants had the gift of tears, and when the officer in command of the troops occupied the manor of Champtocé that very night with all his men, he was deeply touched by their grief. This did not prevent him, to be sure, from exacting food and shelter for his soldiers, which Jacques furnished much against his will. This was told me, at all events, for I passed that sad night of September 11th on the damp ground beside my father, who forgot his own wounds to bind up mine. While we were expecting death in our wretched hiding-place, strange things were going on at the manor, and very serious ones."

"We were watched, kept constantly in sight by the soldiers," said the banker.

"The watch could not have been very strict, for towards three in the morning Jacques and François left the watchers sleeping, and were heard talking in a low tone in the corridor leading to the vault in the eastern tower."

"That is false!" This cry was uttered simultaneously by both of the accused, and Bouscareau added, with consummate impudence: "No one saw it, so no one can say so."

"Speak, Bernard," said Albert, coldly.

When the old groom, who, since the beginning of the narrative, had shown many signs of impatience, heard himself called upon to bear witness, he could not contain himself any longer, but rose up, shaking his fist in the faces of the men whom he was about to convict. "I was there," said he, "I was on the spot, and I remember everything as though it were yesterday." M. Brossin, already pale, was ghastly now, and even the cashier failed to hide his agitation. "You know, Monsieur le Marquis," resumed Bernard, "that I left the wood with you, and that you did not see me again on your departure from the manor. On going to the cellar to get a bottle of wine I

sprained my ankle, and when you thought me ahead of you on the road, I was calling out as loudly as I could at the end of the east corridor."

"The rascal, had I only known it!" thought Bouscareau.

"No one heard me," continued Bernard, "and I was in a bitter rage, and had been waiting for a couple of hours when I realised from the noise in the court that the soldiers had entered the château. You may guess that I then kept as quiet as I could. I would rather have died than let myself be taken, and I had almost bidden farewell to life, when I heard soft whispers and some one walking in the passage. I immediately recognised Jacques' voice, and had I not suspected something I should have called out to him. But with his rascal of a clerk he would have wrung my neck."

"If we had we shouldn't be here now," thought Bouscareau.

"Fortunately," resumed the old groom, "I hated those two scoundrels like poison, and I didn't stir. This enabled me to overhear their conversation, and it did not take long to find out what they had come for. They had a pickaxe each of them, and they had come to demolish the wall of the vault and take away the treasure. Ah! they did not lose any time in robbing their master!" The cashier's eyes blazed, but M. Brossin hid his face in his hands. "Jacques had some scruples," continued Bernard, "and I heard him say every now and then: 'But what if the old man is still alive?' And François replied: 'Hold your tongue, you fool! What do you take me for? The ambushade was too well planned, and I'll guarantee that not one of them escaped.'"

"Yes," said M. de Champtocé, in a low, grave, voice, "the miserable swineherd had sold the life of the generous master who had raised him from his degradation."

"Yes," rejoined Bernard, "and the Judas did it, not for the five hundred francs which he received from the commander of the soldiers, the brave hound! but to share the Spanish doubloons with that scamp of a Jacques."

"And they did share them, did they not, my friend?" asked M. de Champtocé, calmly.

"Yes. The wall did not resist their blows for long, and I heard them pulling the bags of gold about, just as our Saintonge hounds pull a stag about when it is down."

Not a sound, this time, came from the culprits on the stools! "Thank you, Bernard," said M. de Champtocé, "let me now finish the tale of infamy. A month after our defeat in the wood, my father and I arrived in London, after many dangers and great fatigue. There our small resources were soon exhausted, and before the end of that fatal year the head of the house of Champtocé died of poverty and grief in a garret."

"And I had not the consolation of being there to kneel at his bedside," murmured the old servant.

"He spoke of you before he died," resumed Albert, "and you served him better by remaining in France. His son was left alone in the world, an exile, and deprived of everything. His native land was forbidden ground to him. He wrote to his father's faithful steward, but received no reply. He thought that his letters had been intercepted by the post office authorities, and resolved to leave Europe, hoping at some future day to be able to return to France and find the honest guardian of his little treasure, whom it had never entered his thoughts for one moment to suspect."

"Ah! if I had not been hunted by the police myself!" interrupted Bernard.

"I went away," resumed the marquis, "and became a sailor. This life of danger and excitement suited me better than any quiet business pursuit on shore, and for fifteen years I sailed on every ocean of the globe. While I was trying to win a fortune at the cost of unheard-of fatigue and peril, the faithful Jacques and his friend François had left the manor, which had been sold to meet the expenses of the law. They had gone to a little town in the neighbourhood, and their affairs were beginning to prosper. What were they doing? No one knew, exactly, in the place where they lived."

"They were usurers!" exclaimed the old groom, "and they ruined all the peasantry in the district."

"This was said, indeed, although no one knew where they had obtained their capital. At all events, one evening, exactly twenty years ago, I presented myself at the house of the former steward of Champtocé. Fresh disaster had fallen upon me after a few years of happiness, and I had come to France in the hope—the only one I had—of receiving from Jacques the treasure which my father had confided to him; and when I learned that he had become almost a rich man, I felt very glad; for if he had been poor I don't know whether I should have had the courage to reclaim my property. It seems to me as though it were but yesterday. I wore my sailor's clothes; but fifteen years had not sufficiently changed my face during my absence for there to be any difficulty in recognising me as the heir of Champtocé, especially on the part of those who had known me in my youth. Unfortunately, our old servants had all left the country after the civil war. The manor-house was inhabited by strangers, and I had never had much to do with the people of the little town where our steward had gone to live. Perhaps the faithful Jacques had taken all this into consideration, for he acted as though none there could have recognised me."

"It was in good faith," stammered the baron, "the dress, the difference in age—"

"I had myself announced by my real name, and I expected that Jacques would welcome me. I should have opened my arms to him, for suspicion had not yet entered my mind; but I committed, it seems, a great mistake in announcing myself as I had done, for I was received by a man who had had time to prepare himself. He did not even take the pains to deny having the treasure; he found it more convenient and easier to tell me to my face that I was simply an impostor."

"I did not believe—I could not believe—in a—a miracle."

"This reception disconcerted me at first," resumed Albert, "but I thought that after all it might be that Jacques had forgotten my features. I even remember that I had the simplicity to admire the prudence with which he refused to admit the statements of a stranger. I should almost have regretted his giving up the treasure without due caution to a person who reclaimed it thus. But I told him all the circumstances of that terrible night of the 11th of September, and entered into such details with reference to my father, myself, the château, and the servants of Champtocé, that the truth would have been apparent even to the most prejudiced person. However, Jacques repeated to me that I was lying."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Bernard.

"I succeeded in mastering my anger," continued the marquis, "I did more, I entreated. Far from France, I had left beings dearer to me than life, and it was their bread which I had come to ask of the man who had lived for so many years on my father's bounty. I swore to him that I did not wish to interfere with the fortune which he had built upon the wreck

of ours, and I begged of him to return, even to lend to me a part of the gold which he had stolen from me. However, Jacques was pitiless."

"I wanted proofs," timidly objected Brossin.

"Indignation seized hold of me at last," said M. de Champtocé, without condescending to notice this pitiable attempt at justification. "I drew myself up, I once more became the Marquis de Champtocé, and I treated, as he deserved, the infamous varlet who dared to deny his master. But in vain did I heap insult upon the scamp, I could not awaken one human emotion in his breast. He replied with perfect calmness that he had no time to waste upon a madman, and that, if I said any more, he would have me turned out of his house. The measure was full. I went out and shook the dust from my feet on the threshold of the traitor's abode. I was about to leave the country where I had found such monstrous ingratitude."

"Ah, marquis, if you had blown out the rascal's brains, how well you would have done!" exclaimed the groom.

"No, I despised him too much; and I had a sore heart, for I had been fond of the wretched man. I remembered the days of my childhood, when he had played and hunted in my company. My father had treated him almost as a son, and I had treated him as a friend." The baron, this time, began to groan in the most distressing manner. "I had made up my mind to go away," resumed the marquis, "and forget the ingrate forever, but I had yet to learn the extent of his infamy. That very night I was arrested, and taken before a magistrate whom Jacques had gained over by his falsehoods; I was accused of two or three offences which were of a nature to place me on the level of a swindler and vagabond."

For a moment Bernard seemed to be beside himself. He gesticulated furiously, threatened the baron and his accomplice with his fist, and seemed about to spring upon them. But his master quieted him with a gesture, and continued in a clearer and louder tone: "Yes, I had been guilty, so said the magistrate, deceived by this miserable scoundrel, of threats of an improper character, and an attempt at swindling. As for my assertion that I was the heir to the name and property of Champtocé it was not even discussed. I was told that the old marquis and his son had been killed in the civil war, and that they had deserved it, as they had been rebels. I wished to protest; but I could not, unfortunately, produce any authentic papers. Proscribed as we had been, and condemned to wander about, we could not take any documents or deeds of property with us. When I spoke of bringing forward the testimony of those who had known me in former days, if there were any in that part of the country, the reply was that it would be time enough to bring such proof forward when the investigating magistrate commenced proceedings, and until then I was to be sent to prison."

"If I had only been there. Oh! Heaven!" murmured the groom.

"Unfortunately, Bernard, you were wandering about, poor and proscribed like your master, and I did not find you till two years afterwards. Ah! Providence rewarded me that day, and made up for all that I had suffered in the house of our 'faithful steward!' You did not refuse to recognize me, although my family had never done for you anything in comparison with what it had done for Jacques. My father did not take you from a ditch, and save you from poverty and death."

"You well know, Monsieur le Marquis," cried Bernard, "that for three generations back, my family has always lived for the sake of yours, and some have even died for the Champtocés."

"I know that, my friend, and it is for that reason that I accepted your

devotion, so generously offered. You did not hesitate to follow me, to share my evil fortunes, to sustain me in the terrible struggle which I was about to begin to reconquer rank and fortune, stolen from me by treachery ; and this although you also had a daughter dear to you."

M. de Champtocé's voice broke here, and he was obliged to pause. The cashier's face, meantime, was a study, for, convinced that his person and fortune were less threatened than the baron's, he had taken heart and was determined to defend himself.

"I will finish my mournful story," said Albert, eventually becoming calm again. "After the odious scene I had submitted to, I lacked the courage to expose myself to fresh affronts, and I resolved to fly. I might, no doubt, have persevered and awaited the public decision in my favour in a court of law, but I had other purposes to carry out. A country jail is not guarded like a Paris prison, and I was strong and skilful enough to scale a wall, and dislodge an iron grating. I did so, and by dawn I was far from the wretched town where I had found naught but injustice due to the lies of a renegade. That outrage had changed my heart. To the scornful pity which I had felt at Jacques' treason, there succeeded an ardent desire for revenge. I coldly weighed the acts of this man, and the benefactions of my father in the balance of justice with the calmness and impartiality of a judge, and my conscience decided for me. While the scamp was, no doubt, rejoicing at having forever got rid of the claims of the man he had despoiled, I recrossed the sea, and as I saw the shores of France vanish I took a solemn oath." The baron shook like a leaf, and the cashier looked much less confident. "I swore never again to set foot on my native land, unless it were to revenge myself, even though I might wait ten years, even twenty years, for the day of vengeance ; and those of my race have never taken an oath in vain."

After these words there came a somewhat long spell of silence. Bouscareau did not dare to speak, and no sound was heard but the heavy breathing of Baron Brossin. "Bernard," said the marquis gravely, at last, "are you ready to swear before this likeness of your old master, that the revelations you have made are true ?" As M. de Champtocé spoke, he raised his hand, and pointed to the portrait of the old noble, whose eyes seemed to glare at the two traitors.

"In the presence of my master, and before Heaven," replied the groom, "I swear that Jacques Brossin and François Bouscareau stole the treasure of Champtocé."

"Stole ! Pooh ! it was given to us," growled the cashier.

"I swear," resumed Bernard, "that François Bouscareau sold us to the enemy for the miserable sum of five hundred francs, and that his infamous treachery caused the death of twenty-two of those who were with us. May their blood be upon his head !"

"Bah ! there is the limitation of law," said the cashier, scornfully ; "go and tell all this to a judge, and hear what he will say."

"Good, my old friend !" said Albert de Champtocé, with a friendly gesture to Bernard, "your testimony would suffice even if we had not got other proofs, for I know that you never lie. Now, baron, tell me what punishment traitors deserve."

"Have mercy on me, Monsieur le Marquis ! have mercy in your father's name !" cried Brossin, who seemed ready to fall on his knees.

"My father's name !" exclaimed Albert, "how can you dare to mention it ? Ah, this is too much impudence !"

"Well, I admit that I am guilty," resumed the banker; "I withheld a secret deposit, I denied my master, but I also had a family, and I wished to make a fortune for their sake; that is my sole excuse. Be it as you say! I have been guilty indeed, and deserve punishment. Tell me yourself, marquis, what it shall be, and though you may exact all I possess, I will give it up to you."

"The sacrifice you offer is nothing, baron, for you possess nothing."

"Say but a word, and my bank, my credit—all is yours," said Brossin, who had not understood the real meaning of this reply.

"I need neither, and, besides, your safe is empty, and your credit gone."

"But—"

"Do you suppose that I am ignorant of your real pecuniary situation? Must I remind you that the failure of Fassitt & Lumley has deprived you of your last resources? Have you forgotten that the Bank of France lately refused to honour your signature, and that you have not enough to meet your payments at the end of the month?"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Marquis—"

"Do not swear. It would be utterly useless."

"Ask my cashier, Bouscareau, whether we shall not be able to pay everything." The cashier made a significant grimace. "Why, this very morning," urged Brossin, "he told me—"

"He told you," interrupted M. de Champtocé, "that your only resource was to sell my two thousand certificates of stock. This was true, you had none other."

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis, can you believe—"

"That you would use the deposit intrusted to you by me? You had done so before. Why shouldn't you do in Paris what you did at Champtocé?"

"But I did not do so, as you have the stock in your possession," exclaimed the banker.

"You did not dare refuse it to me, that is true, because you thought that to-night you would receive a million in gold, and you must have been very confiding not to suspect me when I offered you the sum in Spanish doubloons."

This time the baron found no reply. He realised the extent of his foolish credulity, and he hung his head. Bouscareau looked at him with scornful eyes and shrugged his shoulders. "I can restore the money with interest," stammered Brossin, at last.

"You are too generous," said the marquis.

"I am not so completely ruined as you think; I still have my house on the Boulevard Haussmann, my château and my lands in Normandy."

"All that belongs to the creditors of your banking-house, baron, and Heaven forbid that I should deprive them of their dues!"

"But I could borrow, everybody believes me to be rich, and I am ready to try anything to indemnify you."

"Do you believe," replied M. de Champtocé, "that I would consent to such deception?"

"You are my creditor as well as they, the first of all, your debt is sacred and—"

"You think then that my aim in bringing you here is to recover the paltry sum of which you robbed me? to force you to restore it?"

"I know that you wish to punish me," replied Brossin, humbly.

"And you think that punishment would be enough? Really, you look

very lightly upon the wrong which you did your master! Ten years of struggling, danger, and suffering are to be paid for by handing back eighty thousand francs! That is very cheap! Ah! I forgot that you said with interest!"

This prolonged mockery was the most cruel torture to which the marquis could expose his father's steward, but Bouscareau did not take any of it to himself and became bolder and bolder. His face expressed lively satisfaction with himself as he listened attentively. He was thinking. "How wise I was to separate my business from that of such a fool as Brossin, and not to expose my property to the liability of seizure."

"Let us finish with this tiresome subject," resumed the marquis, "and be easy as regards any money you may have; I have no design upon it, and do not even wish for a farthing of it, for the excellent reason that I do not need it. I am not, as you believed, Count d'Alcamo, or a Sicilian nobleman, but I am much richer than you have ever been, even when you were most wealthy. It is not money that I need from you."

"What do you need of me?" murmured the baron, turning pale.

"Well," replied M. de Champtocé, coldly, "you will think me very old-fashioned, but I must tell you that I believe in law as practiced by barbarians, and in punishing, I believe only in retaliation."

"What! are you going to put me in prison?" groaned the baron.

"No, no, it is not in that way that I understand retaliation. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' said the warriors of bygone days, when only physical chastisement was in use. At the present time we have something better than such primitive punishment. I should like to know what I should gain by inflicting corporal punishment upon you, or throwing you into a dungeon with your worthy friend, Monsieur Bouscareau?" The cashier did not budge on hearing his name mentioned in this very unsatisfactory manner. He believed himself to be safe from all physical and moral punishment, and merely thought of separating his own cause from that of his unlucky master. "Do you think, sir," continued the Marquis de Champtocé, "that the only wrong you did me was to make me spend a few hours between four walls in a country jail? Do you think that I have not suffered in my dearest affections?"

"I thought that you were alone in the world," stammered the baron.

"I told you but a moment ago that when I claimed my inheritance it was in order that I might procure bread for my family. You refused it to me, and for want of this paltry sum, which had already been tripled in your hands at the time when I begged of you to restore it to me, my poor wife died without having again seen the husband who adored her, and a dear daughter lived on to the age of twenty without being able to embrace her father. Do you understand, now?" Brossin was, indeed, beginning to understand. "You are ruined, sir," resumed the marquis, "but it is Heaven that punished you in that way. It would not allow your ill-gotten money to profit you, so it set a term to your iniquitous prosperity. The rest I did, I alone!"

"The rest!" murmured the banker, in amazement.

"You have just seen your son," resumed Albert, "and I need not tell you anything about him."

"Alfred? oh, I swear to you that he is not guilty; and, when you learn how he was entrapped into following those thieves—"

"Entrapped, you say? Entrapped into scaling a wall, and in company with two escaped convicts! That, it must be confessed, is a strange weak-

ness on the part of a rich young man, a man of society. I wonder how a magistrate will look upon this amiable weakness; but, let me proceed. Is it anything of the same kind that led him to forge the signature of one of his friends upon a note?"

"You know that?" exclaimed Brossin.

"Yes, and a deal else, besides," replied the marquis, coldly.

"His friend won't denounce him; I saw him to-day, and he promised me to keep silent."

"This obliging friend may do so, but how about the holder of the notes? Will he show the same indulgence?"

"I will pay him, and get him to abandon the matter, and he would be very cruel if—"

"Or, in a great hurry to be paid. The bills were presented yesterday morning and your son did not pay them. Yesterday, in the afternoon, the bearer went to the charming young man, whose name was upon them as endorser, and I assure you he did not hesitate to say at once that his signature had been forged. He may have regretted that afterwards, but by this time the holder of the notes must have put the matter in the hands of the law."

"To get back his money he will willingly withdraw his complaint, no doubt. I will go to the magistrate who has it under consideration, and he won't refuse to listen to the entreaties of a father who is known by everybody to be an honourable man."

"That honourability is likely to suffer at the end of the month, but no matter, you still enjoy the consideration shown to a monied man. But you must also explain Monsieur Alfred's nocturnal expedition, and I very much doubt whether any judge, however indulgent he may be, will take upon himself to set your son at liberty, together with the ex-convicts with whom he has associated. Now, you can measure, in some degree, what awaits your son. At present, I wish to speak to you of your daughter."

"My daughter!" cried M. Brossin. "Henriette! I saw her just now—unless it was an illusion."

"No, it was not an illusion: she is really here!"

"But how? And why did she look so miserable and ill?"

"How she came here?" replied the marquis. "Did you not authorize me, this very day, to try and find her? You see that I succeeded. Why she looks ill? Let me tell you. I found her at Montmartre—she had gone there, to a miserable den, to hide her shame—"

"Her shame! good God!" cried the baron, hiding his face in his hands. "Ah! this is the last blow—" Tears streamed from his eyes, and this time his grief was really sincere.

"Have you no idea as to the name of the man who wronged her?" asked the marquis, after a brief pause.

The baron started, and tried to reflect. But his mind had been so heavily taxed during the last hour that he could not think of a reply. At last, however, he murmured: "I cannot tell— But I would give my life to know that man's name—for, perhaps, he would take pity upon her, and consent to repair the wrong he has done her."

"Well, I will assist you on that point," said M. de Champtocé, gravely. "At least, so far as the man's name goes. The scamp who has wronged your daughter is your friend, Monsieur Jules Noridet."

"It can't be possible!" exclaimed M. Brossin, in consternation at this discovery.



"Spare me your doubts. Remember your folly in confiding your daughter to Monsieur Noridet's protection one day at Biville—"

"What then? Ah! I remember now—the beach—the tide—it was he who saved her."

"Well, do you now think that Noridet, who is a millionaire two or three times over, cares to become your son-in-law?"

M. Brossin knew that Noridet was not the man to yield to conscientious scruples, and he was aware that his own position was not calculated to tempt a wealthy, egotistical young man into marrying Henriette. He began to realise that he was indeed lost.

"I told you that your chastisement would be in proportion to your crimes," slowly resumed M. de Champtocé. "Jacques Brossin robbed, betrayed, and denied his master; Jacques Brossin suffers in his fortune as well as in his children. Providence is just, and I am but the instrument of its revenge."

"But I am not the only one who is guilty," cried the baron, who was beginning to lose his wits; "no, it was not I who did all the harm, and, but for the bad advice of François, I should never have touched the money. It was he who ruined me!"

"Hold your tongue!" growled Bouscareau. "You didn't need any urging to go to the vault, and open it. It was not I, I presume, who sent the marquis to prison. I was travelling when he came to Anjou."

"Yes," said the banker, at once, "but you profited as much as I did by the theft, and, at all events, I did not cause blood to be shed. I did not sell my brother peasants to the soldiers who killed them in the woods of La Houssaie!"

"You lie! you scoundrel!" howled the exasperated cashier.

The marquis looked with utter contempt at the two scoundrels who reciprocally cast their shame into each other's face. "Be silent, and hear your judge," said he, in a loud tone. "François Bouscareau is a traitor, and François Bouscareau shall be punished as a traitor."

"Bah! I am tired of all this!" said the cashier, letting his brutal nature get the better of his policy. "For an hour past you have been throwing our youthful freaks in our teeth. If this fool of a Jacques is afraid of you, I'm not, for I have nothing to lose. I know that you can murder me, here, to-night, if you like; but you won't be fool enough to expose yourself to an arrest, and all that," added he.

"You are right. I don't wish to kill you."

"Well, then, as I have no banking-house, no wife, no son, no daughter, I defy you and laugh at you, and you cannot punish me in any way whatever, as you cannot deprive me of anything!"

"What! not even of the fortune which is in that note case in your breast pocket?" As he spoke, the marquis pointed to the big overcoat in which Bouscareau had arrayed himself.

"That is not true! I have nothing there!" cried the cashier, assuming a defensive attitude.

Brossin, startled, but not sorry for this diversion, looked alternately from the accused to the accuser, endeavouring to divine the meaning of the scene. "You have enough there," resumed M. de Champtocé, "to save your employer from failure. Only you haven't the slightest wish to use your money for that purpose."

"Come now, Monsieur le Marquis," said Bouscareau, in a much milder tone, "this is a joke at the expense of your humble servant."

"I didn't think that you had so little tact, Monsieur Bouscareau. How can you imagine that I would condescend to joke with a man like you?"

"Like me! Like me! I'm a poor devil and that is all."

"Not so poor, as you carry a pocket-book that would tempt a great many people."

"Oh, yes! an empty pocket-book," growled the cashier, who saw that he could not hide the bulging of his coat.

"You speak very lightly of your savings."

"Well, even if I have any, after all, what of that? Suppose that I have amassed, copper by copper, a little sum, by toiling for thirty years, it seems to me that it does not concern any one but myself."

"Do you really think that, Monsieur Bouscareau?"

"Certainly," said the scoundrel with consummate impudence.

"Then it would matter little, it appears, whether the starting-point of your wealth were treachery or not. Provided a man works and piles up his treasure, it is of no consequence whether or not the first gold he earned was blood-money. This is a new theory, and I can easily understand that you desire to propagate it."

"I repeat that I know the law, that my money is *mine*, and that no one has any right to meddle with my affairs. Where should we be, I should like to know, if we inquired into the source of all the fortunes that are made? And supposing that it did vex me, I should not be the only person here who wouldn't care to render an account."

"You talk very well, Monsieur Bouscareau," replied the marquis, quietly, "but I have not the least wish to discuss points of law or moral questions with you. You have saved some money, that is all very well; it amounts to a respectable sum. So much the better. What is less commendable, is the repugnance which you have always shown to parting with it even for an hour."

"I do not know what you mean. I have nothing in the world but a shanty in my province, and a few crowns in the drawers of my writing table."

"You forget the bank-notes and the treasury-bonds, Monsieur Bouscareau."

The marquis, this time, had no doubt guessed rightly; for the cashier sprang up from his chair, and instinctively placed his hand upon the pocket which contained his treasure.

"Ah, you are a far-seeing man," resumed M. de Champtocé, "and you haven't, like your friend Jacques, committed the imprudence of running great financial risks. While he was tendering loans, and promoting railway companies, you peacefully pursued your operations as a money-lender; you lent 'by the week,' and your money did not long remain out of your cash-box. While the baron was negotiating with stocks and shares, buying land, and building houses and chateaux, you were converting your money into safe portable bonds, and you did not lose sight, day or night, of this powerful viaticum. That was truly practical philosophy, for, with the sum which you have about you, a person can always start at a moment's notice for England or the United States."

"I have no reason for leaving my own country," said the cashier, with feigned assurance.

"Who knows? and, however clear your conscience may be, you may not care to meet a disagreeable person—like myself, for instance—and in that case, it is convenient to be able to leave France in an hour's time, and without leaving anything behind."

"I am not afraid of any one, not even of you," replied Bouscareau, in a rough tone.

"Come, in your place," continued M. de Champtocé, without replying to this insolence, "that is what I should do—go abroad. You say that you have no property or family, and besides, you no longer have to take care of Monsieur Brossin's money for him, as he has none left." The baron sighed heavily on hearing this. "Yes, it would be a good time to go abroad," added the marquis.

"I don't say that I sha'n't," muttered the cashier, placing both hands upon the breast of his coat, which was stuffed out with thousand-franc notes.

"Well, do so; and with your activity and intelligence you will no doubt make another fortune, for I will allow you to take forty thousand francs with you, and I am sure that you will be able to turn that little sum to good account. It represents just your half of the Spanish doubloons which you took from the vault."

"What do you mean?" howled Bouscareau, in a rage.

"I mean that I want the million which you have in your note case."

"Never!" cried Bouscareau, wildly.

"Lay it upon the table!"

"Come and take it," shrieked Bouscareau, sharply, at the same time seizing hold of the stool, upon which he had been sitting, to use it as a weapon of defence.

"Take your seat again," said the marquis, with scornful calmness, "and don't oblige me to call my servants who are behind that door. You must not forget that it would suffice for me to make a sign to Bernard, to open the door and to say one word for the attendants to shackle you like a criminal."

The cashier looked around him with haggard eyes, and seemed like a wild beast caught in a trap. He no doubt saw that an attempt at flight or resistance would fail, for he put down his stool and remained standing with his arms crossed, and his head bent down, as though to press to his heart for a moment longer the treasure which he would be compelled to relinquish.

"Now, give me the pocket-book," said M. de Champtocé, firmly.

"This is infamous violence! it is a perfect snare," cried Bouscareau, "and if I yield, it is in order not to be knocked down by your rascally hirelings. But I protest! yes, I protest with all my might, and to-morrow we shall see what the police will say to all this."

"Give me the pocket-book!"

The cashier put his hand to his pocket, grinding his teeth with rage as he did so, and the pocket-book came forth, puffed out with precious papers. However, before parting with it, the owner once more tried to soften his judge. "What, Monsieur le Marquis! you—you consent to take this money? You will act like a sheriff does when he seizes upon a poor man's goods to make him pay his taxes? This is a fine tax that you are making me pay. Well, so be it. I have deserved it, but I could never have believed that you would soil your hands by taking it."

This pathetic speech had a little more success than the blustering which had preceded it. "Who says," began M. de Champtocé, with a haughty air, "that I wish to take the miserable million you have made, thanks to your early theft? You say that it is a tax. Never did you speak more truly, for I take this money to use for a purpose known to myself."

"Whether you take it for yourself or others, it matters little to me so long as you take it."

"This million shall be used to make reparation, and, for the last time, I order you to place it upon this table."

Bouscareau once more glanced at the door, but remembering that this sole means of egress was guarded, he made a gesture of despair, and held out his dear treasure. "When I think that if I had invested my money, this could not have happened," he murmured, convulsively pressing the pocket-book once more to his breast.

"Too much prudence is sometimes a bad thing," sneered Albert.

"There goes the money which I have had such trouble to save!" cried the cashier, in a tragic tone; "take it! strip me of all I have! reduce me to poverty. There!" And at the same moment, the precious notes fell upon the table.

"Take that, Bernard," said M. de Champtocé, pointing disdainfully to the pocket-book. The old groom obeyed, not without visible repugnance, however, at touching the vile money.

"Now," said the marquis, "now the sentence upon François Bouscareau has been carried out; and to-morrow it will be your turn, Jacques Brossin."

The baron gazed with haggard eyes at his judge. "Monsieur le Marquis," he pleaded: "do not reduce me to despair—spare my poor children—ruin me, dishonour me, kill me if you choose, but my daughter, my poor daughter—what has she done to you?"

"Did you have any pity for mine?"

"Yours! Ah! I do not know her, but Heaven is my witness that I would like to devote the rest of my life to repairing the wrong I have done her, and it is in her name that I beg of you to show mercy to poor Henriette."

There must have been an accent of sincerity in M. Brossin's lamentations, for M. de Champtocé had become extremely pale, and one could see that he was moved. "What o'clock is it, Bernard?" he suddenly asked the old groom.

"Half past twelve, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Then go and see if my orders have been executed."

Bernard rose up and left the room. After his departure there was a profound silence. M. de Champtocé folded his arms and waited. The baron, motionless and mute, anxiously asked himself what was now about to take place. As for Bouscareau, he still stared at the table on which he had laid his now vanished wealth, and, had he dared, he would have run after the old groom who, in obedience to his master, had placed the well-stuffed note-case in one of his large pockets. The scene was sad and solemn in this spacious room with its dark hangings, looking as it did like some hall in the ducal palace where the State Inquisitors of Venice were wont to sit. When Bernard returned, he whispered a few words to the marquis, who presently went out with him, after giving him a nod of approval. The accomplices were left alone.

"What does this new move mean?" now said M. Brossin, with a look of alarm.

"I don't know, and I don't care," replied Bouscareau, roughly; "so long as my money is in the hands of those rascals, the rest is nothing to me."

"Don't talk so loud, you may be overheard!" whispered Brossin, eagerly, and seeming more and more alarmed.

"What do I care who hears me? Do you think I hesitate to say what

I think, now that I am deprived of everything? They may take my very skin if they like. I don't care!"

"But I do; and I hope that my prayers have touched the marquis's heart, and that he will consent to spare my poor children."

"Your children! A great loss that fool of an Alfred would be to society!"

"You need not insult my poor son, you, who are the cause of all my misfortunes."

"I the cause of your misfortunes!" cried Bouscareau: "idiot that you are, if you had only listened to me in your office when I warned you to beware of this pretended Italian, if you had not stunned me with your stupid praises of him, we should not have run our heads into this place, like rats into a trap!"

"And what good would it have done me to remain at home, with my son and daughter already in the power of the marquis? What should we have gained by remaining free?"

"Speak for yourself, you fool! If you are ruined by playing the fine gentleman—if the stupid vanity of all the Brossins—male and female—has cost you all that you possess, I haven't been a spendthrift for my part. I have never had a château—or a house on the Boulevard Haussmann; I never bought any barony that was for sale second hand. No; I have slaved like a negro; I have deprived myself of everything; I have cudgelled my brains to turn my poor money to account, and now your idiotic confidence in this man deprives me of a fortune earned by the sweat of my brow! Ah, there are moments when I feel like flying at your throat and strangling you!"

"Why did you carry your money about with you? Did you ever hear of anyone else going about with a million in his pocket—at night-time especially—and on going to see a man whom you looked upon with mistrust?"

"Why did I do so? You have the face to ask me why I never left my money behind me? But it is you—fool that you are—who are the cause of all that as well as all the rest. It was because I daily expected to see you declared bankrupt, and didn't care to follow you to the galleys, and so held myself in readiness to make off."

"I recognise you thoroughly in that, François," replied the banker, bitterly. "Your heart is as bad as it was when you came skulking to the manor after betraying your master. You would have betrayed me as you betrayed him. That would have followed as a matter of course, and I ought to have expected it."

"And you are as big a coward as on the night at the vault, when you dared not begin to break down the wall for fear that the marquis was not really dead. But come, Jacques, instead of insulting one another, we had much better spend our time in trying to find a way out of here? I'll venture to say that you've forgotten your appointment with your Monsieur Noridet."

"Noridet! The scamp who has wronged my daughter," cried the baron, "I hope I shall never see him again!"

"Pooh! Never mind all that. If, as he promised, he is walking about in the neighbourhood, he might give us a famous lift."

"But we cannot let him know. It would be a thousand times better to resign ourselves, and try to soften the marquis."

"What good would that do me? He wouldn't give me back my money, would he?"

"Perhaps a part. Didn't he say that he would give you forty thousand francs?"

"Yes; but on conditions that I should go off beyond the seas, and set up somewhere in Australia or California. Thank you! I am not disposed to begin my little business all over again. I'm too old for it."

"I should be only too happy if he would forgive my unlucky Alfred, and give me enough to go and live the best way I can in some corner."

"Are you fool enough to think that he will do that? All the Champ-tocés are as hard as oak. A man doesn't entertain the idea of revenging himself for twenty long years to give it up at his enemy's first lamentations, when he has brought him to the ground."

"I don't say that he does, still, in spite of everything, I still have some hope."

"That's your business; but I have made up my mind, and if on conditions that I go away, he ventures to offer me any alms out of the pocket-book he took from me by sheer force, I shall tell him that it does not suit me to accept, and that I love my beautiful native land too well to leave it."

"But what will become of you, in your beautiful native land?"

"Don't trouble your head about me. I am not a fool or a coward, whatever this cursed nobleman may say, and I shall find a way to make him give back his plunder."

"I doubt that very much," muttered the baron.

"Doubt it as much as you please. The police have been invented for the protection of one and all, and the commissary of this district won't refuse to come and search this nest of guerillas. It isn't a very smart thing to have returned to France, after commanding a gang in Anjou in 1832, fighting against the troops."

"But there must have been an amnesty since then."

"What of that? It always looks bad under any government, for a man to have run about all over the country at the head of insurgent peasants. Besides, I suppose that it is forbidden in civilised countries to take the law into one's own hands in this way, under pretext of 'chastisement' and 'retaliation' and all that kind of thing."

"You are right, perhaps," said Brossin, lowering his voice. "To-morrow we can see what we can do in that direction, and when we tell the authorities what has happened—"

"Oh, as for that, you mustn't have any illusion as regards your own matters. All the authorities in creation can't prevent you from being bankrupt, or keep your son from going to prison, or your daughter from being left on your hands to become an old maid."

"One would think that you enjoyed my misfortunes," said the baron, sharply.

"Not at all; but I wish to separate my cause from yours. You are vulnerable on all sides, and I understand that you prefer to try submission and beg for the marquis's indulgence. If the authorities annoy him about you, he need only say that he isn't the cause of your failure or of your family misfortunes. But it is different with me. I have been deceived, ensnared and robbed as though I had met a highway robber, and the marquis might be sent to the galleys for this."

"The marquis would deny everything."

"I shall call upon you as a witness."

"Don't count upon me," said Brossin, promptly. "You said just now

that we had no common cause. I shall try to soften the marquis, if I find it to be my interest to do so."

"You are a perfect rascal!"

"No insults, pray. You had better remember that you will find it very hard to make the police believe that you, who have always passed yourself off as a poor man, had a million in your pocket."

This was evidently true, and the cashier bit his lips with rage. "Ah!" he growled, "you are a traitor and a coward; Monsieur de Champocé told the truth when he said so; but I shall manage matters without you; you may be sure of that! Let me only find Jules Noridet to-morrow! I am sure that he and I will come to an understanding. He is bold, and he is rich, and I have a kind of presentiment that he hates the marquis." Bouscareau was still talking in this strain, when the door opened and a most unexpected person entered the room.

### XXX.

THE two culprits had felt quite sure that the marquis was about to reappear, followed by his servants, or his groom. Brossin, who felt that the end of the scene was approaching, prepared to show himself humble and suppliant. Bouscareau himself had lost a part of his assurance, and thought of the final assault; but both their faces completely changed when they recognised the person who now entered the red room. "Monsieur Noridet!" they exclaimed at once. And the cashier added in a low tone: "Talk of the old gentleman and he'll appear!"

"Here I am," said Noridet, as coolly as though he had met Brossin in his own office. "You look as though you didn't expect me."

"Well, we didn't," said Bouscareau, "still you come at a good time."

"Yes," added the banker, savagely. "I wish to ask you—"

"Come," interrupted Noridet, "what does all this mean? You made me wait for an hour at the Barrière de Fontainebleau, still I don't complain as we are all here now, but why did you send for me to come here?"

"Send? We?" exclaimed both of M. de Champocé's prisoners at once.

"Yes, you? I don't suppose that Monsieur de Monville knew that I was waiting."

"But we are prisoners; we sent no one to you. You have been deceived."

"This is too much! What foolish trick have you been up to now, baron? Why did you take it into your head to act alone instead of coming to our appointment?"

"I have been deceived myself, and was brought here against my will."

"Well, if you do not explain yourself more clearly I shall go off again, as I am in no humour to listen to riddles."

"Gentlemen," said Bouscareau, who now thought fit to interfere, "don't let us lose time in playing at 'questions and answers.' Monsieur Noridet, be kind enough to tell us what has passed, and how you got in here, so that we may contrive to go out together."

"It is easily told. I arrived at the appointed hour, a few moments before midnight, and I began to feel surprised at your want of punctuality, when a man came up to me, bowed, called me by name, and said he came from you."

"And you believed him?"

"Why shouldn't I have believed him? No one could have guessed our intentions, or have made up a story as to your expecting me."

"And what did he say to you?"

"That you had gone to the commissary of police to tell him about the snare set for your son, and ask his assistance. He added that you had had to deal with a magistrate who was very much interested in the matter, and who came at once with three plain clothes policemen to Monsieur de Monville's house and entered it in the name of the law. Everything has turned out very well, it appears, and I congratulate you on the skill with which you have managed matters."

"This is something unheard of!" exclaimed Brossin.

"The messenger said that he was one of the three police agents, and seemed very intelligent, I must say. He took me at once to the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette, let me in by the little door which he had left open, and then conducted me across the park as though he knew the way perfectly well."

"Of course! He is one of the gang," growled Bouscareau.

"Come now! I have told you everything; so tell me what all this means, instead of looking so astonished. I don't mind a joke, but this seems to me a bad time for playing tricks. Tell me all about Monville and what the commissary said to him. I should have preferred to manage all this without the police, but as it is done—"

"Monville!" interrupted Bouscareau, raising his arms to heaven, "there is no more Monville in the matter than police."

"What do you mean? Are you in earnest?" said Noridet, frowning.

"I should say that I am! We are all in the clutches of a much worse brigand than your Jack of the Cliffs, and he must also have a spite against you as he has played you this trick, and has caught you in the trap as well."

"Then the police agent—"

"Was some servant rigged out for the occasion."

Noridet turned very pale and remained silent for a few moments. "Have you seen this man who takes people prisoners in this way?" he asked, anxiously.

"More than we cared, I assure you. He has just taken a large sum of money from me," replied Bouscareau.

"Then he is merely a commonplace rascal, a robber who only wants money?"

"He wants money and he wants to disgrace us, the baron, me, and very probably you as well, since he has got you in here, just as he did us."

"I will undertake to make him repent of it," said Noridet, raising his head, haughtily.

"And I will help you," cried Bouscareau. "To-night he plays the magistrate, but to-morrow we will have a commissary after him, and we shall see whether he will be able to get out of the mess."

Noridet, who did not care to have recourse to the police if he could possibly help it, made no haste to reply. "Gentlemen," said he at last, "I am at your orders, and it seems to me that we three between us can surely punish this scamp; I say we three, for I surely need not ask, my dear baron, whether you will join us. You will lend your help, if only to get your son out of the scrape."

"Yes, he's locked up here—in a vault with two roughs, and the owner of this place pretends that he tried to commit burglary here."

"Ah! ah!" growled Noridet, who knew what to think on this point,



and he was about to tell his companions of the scene he had witnessed on the night before, when M. Brossin darted towards him. The baron had been trying to control himself ever since Noridet's arrival, but he was unable to remain quiet any longer, and in a few hot words he now began to reproach his daughter's seducer for his infamous conduct. "Yes!" he cried, "I know everything—and my unfortunate child is here—overcome with grief and shame—almost dying—"

"What! Mademoiselle Brossin here!" cried Noridet, "it can't be possible! You must be mad. How can she have got here?"

"The man who disposes of your life and mine took pity on her. He rescued her from the den to which her shame had led her, and now covers her with his protection. He has more heart than you have, Monsieur Noridet!"

M. de Nathis's nephew was astounded, and, in fact, secretly alarmed. However, he found sufficient courage to say: "Before replying to a charge which I can only scorn, may I venture to ask you the name of this generous protector who saves the daughter whilst persecuting the son, the father, and the father's friends?"

"His name is the Marquis de Champtocé," replied the banker, firmly. "And you will have to settle accounts with him."

Noridet breathed again. He had feared for a moment that he might hear a name he justly dreaded. "And so," said he, "we are not in the house of your friend, Jack of the Cliffs, alias Monsieur de Monville, as I supposed. But who is this marquis? I never heard his name before."

"We know it only too well," said the cashier, lowering his voice. "And, if you wish to see his face, you have only to look at that portrait yonder."

A shudder ran through Noridet's frame. He had seen the fatal portrait as he entered. Already, on the evening before, after the strange adventure which had brought him to the red room, he had been alarmed on recognising the dreaded features of Alcamo. The words now spoken by Bouscareau reminded him of this terrible resemblance, and he scarcely dared to turn towards the portrait. Still he made up his mind to do so, and began to talk loudly, like cowards who sing to try and gain courage. "So this is like him, is it? I don't suppose, however, that he shows himself attired as a brigand chief, like this tall fellow with the hat and feathers? That is just the thing, however, for a fine gentleman who waylays people to blackmail them. I must have a good look at this dreadful man—"

Noridet did not finish, for an apparition—but in the flesh—now rose before him, and one that he did not care to see. Bernard had entered the room, and so softly that no one had seen or heard him, and he was now standing motionless, directly under his master's picture. Noridet was somewhat puzzled at seeing him in an attire in which he had never before beheld him, as he had always worn black on appearing as Count d'Alcamo's steward, or else an apron as the smith of the Rue Vaucaux. However, although Bernard had suffered, his features had not changed so much as to prevent recognition. Noridet asked himself at first whether he was not the dupe of some illusion, for he had last seen the valet in a state of mental and physical prostration, which had not promised such a cure. Now, however, he saw that his eyes sparkled with hate as well as with intelligence, and in his glance he read the determination to have revenge, and the certainty of securing it.

"You recognise me, sir, don't you?" said the groom, coldly.

"Why should I deny it?" said Noridet, striving to remain calm. "It isn't so very long since we met."

"True, sir, and you must remember it as you were in the custody of two policemen."

"I see with pleasure," replied Noridet, impudently, "that your health has improved since then, and I am not surprised at it, as I recommended you very warmly to the commissary, and I heard that you had been placed in an excellent lunatic asylum."

"I there recovered all that I had lost, even my memory."

"I'm delighted to hear it, I'm sure!"

Louise's father asked himself how it was that his would-be murderer looked so much at ease. Had he been able to read what was passing in his mind, he would have found that he was thinking as follows: "All that has happened here has been contrived by Fortoto. This is the firm of 'Fortoto & Co.' The father-in-law helps the son-in-law, and they have Jack of the Cliffs with them, besides. This pretty set must be living on the remains of Alcamo's spoils, and they have taken it into their heads to keep up his quarrel with me; however I am not afraid of them. Now that he is at the bottom of the Rhine I don't fear anyone."

The two witnesses of this scene did not understand it. Brossin was not much surprised that Noridet should recognise the steward, as he had seen him at Monville, but as to the allusion to the arrest he could not guess its meaning.

"Come," asked Noridet, after a pause, "how it is that people here kidnap and detain a respectable banker, and his no less respectable cashier, and then myself who am as respectable as they are."

"Quite so," replied Bernard.

"You shall pay for your insolence, fellow, as I see that you mean to be insolent—as well as for all the rest of it," said Noridet, angrily. "Who is at the head of this farcical affair, and who sent me a false policeman to bring me into this den which looks like a cut-throat's abode?"

"You were brought here by my master's orders."

"And who is this master of yours, who has taken a leaf out of Vidocq's book?"

"Vidocq hunted down rascals, and so does my master. His name, since you wish to know it, is the Marquis de Champtocé."

This name, first heard from Brossin, and now from Bernard, and which, moreover, was completely unknown to Noridet, disconcerted and irritated him; still, infatuated with his idea, he persisted in thinking that it must be Jack of the Cliffs or Monville under another new name. "Marquis or not," said Noridet, "I advise him not to trouble honest people who might shut their eyes to his fanciful changes of identity, but who won't let him attack them with impunity."

"My master fears no one," replied Bernard, in a tone of utter contempt. "You seem to have forgotten what took place in the Rolleboise tunnel."

Noridet had hoped that although the valet had recovered his reason he was not yet lucid enough to remember the crime in the train. The scamp was now cruelly undeceived; still he put a bold face on the matter and rejoined, "Be kind enough to spare me your travelling impressions, and bring me face to face with your master, whoever he is. I wish to talk with him, but not with his servants."

"You wish to see me, sir; here I am," at this moment said a piercing, sonorous voice, which made Noridet start.

The master's entrance was a perfect "stage effect." Brossin and Bouscareau dreaded, but expected it; so that their embarrassment was nothing to the terror that overcame Noridet. His blood froze in his veins at the first words spoken by Bernard's master, and when he saw the new comer slowly approach him, he staggered as though he had been struck by lightning. The seat which the groom had occupied was near, and he sunk upon it overcome. M. de Champtocé had now laid aside his naval uniform, and wore the simple but elegant attire in which he had always appeared as Count d'Alcarno. It was impossible for Noridet to make any mistake. It was indeed the man whom he had twice thought he had slain. The Rhine had yielded up its prey, like the sea beneath the Monville cliffs, and this second resurrection was almost miraculous. Noridet began to think that his enemy was invulnerable, and he bent his head, admitting to himself that he was conquered. What course would be followed by this phantom who had emerged from water and fire, who came from the tomb, as it were, just when the murderer thought that he was delivered from him forever?

Noridet forgot Bernard, Jack of the Cliffs, and the strange meeting with the baron and his cashier in this fantastic abode. He only thought of his first crimes, and the image of Andrée arose in his mind, now distracted by fear. He saw the poor persecuted girl, pointing him out as her assassin to M. d'Alcarno, and he felt that he was lost indeed. Brossin's and Bouscareau's feelings were of a very different nature. Bouscareau espied a chance of safety in this complication, which had brought a new culprit to the marquis's tribunal, and even Henriette's father began to hope. There was indeed something suggestive of this in Albert de Champtocé's change of costume, for in laying aside his naval uniform, he might, they thought, have also laid aside his old resentment and projects of revenge.

Whatever might be his intentions, however, their judge resumed his seat. He pointed to the stools on which the two accomplices also seated themselves, for they saw that a fresh interrogatory was about to take place, and that this time someone else was to be tried. Bernard, meanwhile, took his stand behind his master's chair, and these various preparations greatly increased Noridet's fear. The master and the man seemed to him like two spectres risen to accuse and confound him.

"Monsieur Noridet," now said M. de Champtocé, "a moment ago you expressed a desire to see me. I myself was anxious to see you, as I have many important things to settle with you." Although the marquis's voice was calm, it did not quiet Noridet's fears, for he knew that, however serious the circumstances, Alcarno was always icily cold.

"Now," added Bernard's master. "Compose yourself. For the moment I do not intend to revert to the past so far as I myself am concerned. In sending for you my desire was to be of service to Baron Brossin. He will explain to you the matter in hand. Speak, baron," added M. de Champtocé.

Brossin could scarcely believe his ears—he was no longer an accused: he was to be accuser, for all this undoubtedly concerned his daughter. "Yes," said he haughtily, turning to Jules Noridet. "You know my reasons for complaint, I told you them just now—I received you at my house because I believed you to be an honourable man, but you profited by my confidence to lead my daughter astray."

"I deny it!" cried Noridet in a rage.

"You deny it—have you forgotten the day when we imprudently confided her to your protection at Biville on the beach?"

"I remember that I then saved her life, that is all."

"She herself shall confound you!" cried M. Brossin, forgetting his own troubles in his daughter's wrong.

"Bernard," interposed M. de Champtocé, "go and ask Mademoiselle Henriette, on my behalf, to come here and embrace her father."

These words made a deep impression on Noridet who remembered that Alcamo had previously commanded him to marry Henriette. But he lacked time for reflection, for the door now opened, and Henriette pale and feverish entered the room leaning on the old groom's arm. Her father at once darted to her and pressed her to his heart. Noridet himself struggled with his emotion, and by dint of energy he at last succeeded in assuming an expression of indifference. M. de Champtocé had risen to his feet and Henriette was gently seated in his arm chair. A moment's silence followed. Then the marquis, facing Noridet, exclaimed: "Denials are useless. I was at Monville at the time, and you yourself, on a night you must remember, confessed to me that you had wronged Mademoiselle Brossin."

"It isn't true," rejoined Noridet.

"Not true?" said M. de Champtocé scornfully, "spare me your denials. The hour for reparation has come. What it shall be will depend on Baron Brossin's decision."

"I only know of one course in such a matter," said M. Brossin. "Monsieur Noridet must marry my daughter; on that condition I will consent to forgive him."

"You hear?" said M. de Champtocé, turning to Noridet. "To-morrow morning you will call on Madame Brossin and officially ask her for her daughter's hand?"

Noridet was trembling with rage; however, he realised that resistance was useless, at least for the time being, and so in a husky voice he answered, "I will go."

"The marriage," said the marquis, "will take place as soon as possible, and the newly married pair can spend their honeymoon in—don't you think that Switzerland would be a country where you would enjoy yourself?" and so saying, he looked fixedly at Noridet. "I think that you might explain many of its beauties to your wife."

The baron was delighted, and forgot his impending ruin and his imprisoned son in his joy. He felt ready to throw himself at the feet of his former master to thank him. Henriette on her side raised her eyes to M. de Champtocé's with an expression of gratitude; whilst as for Noridet, he hid his rage by a great effort and tried to look unconcerned.

"Bernard," now said M. de Champtocé, "is the brougham ready?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis. It is waiting at the little gate of the park."

"Then, sir," said the marquis to the baron, "my carriage is ready to take you home with your daughter."

An exclamation of delight escaped Brossin's lips. "And I?" asked Bouscareau.

"Before parting," added M. de Champtocé, without paying any attention to the cashier, "I want to tell you, baron, that I propose giving Mademoiselle Henriette a dowry. This million," added he, pointing to the pocket-book containing Bouscareau's money, and which Bernard now held in his hand, "will be hers."

Bouscareau uttered a perfect howl, but his judge paid no attention to his

anger, quietly adding, "Now Monsieur Bouscareau, you can accompany the baron, I wish to remain alone with Monsieur Noridet."

Bouscareau, on hearing this decision, from which there was no appeal, began to make gestures of despair, but an icy glance from his old master checked him, and he grew calmer again, and remained silent, not, however, without grinding his teeth, as he mentally vowed to recover his savings from the baron's daughter. He was at all events glad to be free to go away, and only feared that M. de Champtocé might change his mind in that respect. As for Brossin, the marquis's unexpected generosity so overcame him, that he threw himself upon his knees, yielding to that longing to humble himself, which had been uppermost in his mind since the beginning of the interview. "My master! Monsieur le Marquis!" he cried, with supplicating gestures, "you forgive me, then! you deign to forget the past? All my life shall be devoted to repairing the wrong I have done you, and to blessing your name."

"I have not said that I forgive you," replied M. de Champtocé coldly. These words, disdainfully flung at the enthusiastically grateful baron, acted like a shower-bath upon him.

"Oh, I hoped—good Heaven! I trusted—" he began, between two sobs.

"Rise, sir," said the marquis, and thank your daughter. "It is for her sake, and for her alone, that I control my resentment; I only wish to punish the guilty."

As he spoke, the marquis took hold of Henriette's hand and pressed it. The poor girl was weeping bitterly.

"My son Alfred is also innocent!" urged M. Brossin, now rising to his feet again.

"Of your sins, no doubt, but he has sins of his own to answer for," replied M. de Champtocé.

"Wretch that I am!" exclaimed the baron, with an accent of grief, the sincerity of which could not be mistaken; "it is I—I who am responsible for his conduct in the eyes of Heaven and as regards you, marquis. Had I brought him up differently—had I given him a good example—he would not—no, he would never have degraded his family." The marquis smiled bitterly. "Ah! I understand," said the unhappy father. "I know that Jacques Brossin's son has nothing to lose as to honour. But what can I say? I cannot bear to think of Alfred seated in the dock with criminals—"

"Whether he sits there with other criminals or alone, it will be the same thing. Supposing I let him go off, and say nothing of his attempt at burglary here, it does not follow that I can stop the suit against him for forgery."

The baron groaned and was unable to reply; but Henriette came to his help. "Ah! sir," said she, "I know that my poor brother is very guilty; but you surely will not reject the prayer of one who owes you so much as I do. You wish to give me a dowry," she added, eagerly, "and I see that ruin is falling upon my family. Well, I beg of you to devote the money which you offer me to saving Alfred."

M. de Champtocé looked at Henriette, and saw by the expression of her eyes, that her emotion was unfeigned. Sorrow seemed to have utterly transformed this once frivolous girl. "If you had a daughter," she added softly, "I am sure that she would add her entreaties to mine."

These words decided M. de Champtocé, for he answered, with an emo-

tion which he did not attempt to conceal : " Mademoiselle, your brother shall be restored to you. I promise you that he shall be."

Henriette thanked him, with a grateful look which was more eloquent than words, and when the baron once more wished to protest his gratitude, the marquis stopped him with a gesture. " It is time to go," he said drily. " Madame Brossin must be anxious at your long absence and that of her daughter, and it would be cruel to keep her longer in suspense." Then, as Henriette looked at him entreatingly, he added : " Her son shall return to her as well."

Bernard now opened the door. The four tall lackeys appeared, and Brossin, Bouseareau and Henriette prepared to retire with this escort. M. de Champtocé dismissed the party with these words—at once threatening and promising ; " To-morrow, baron, all that I have said shall be done."

" My daughter will have a husband," thought M. Brossin, as he heard this, " my son will be free, and I shall be ruined !"

As the door closed behind the party, the marquis turned to Noridet and said, " Now we will speak together."

" I am at your orders, since I am in your power," replied Noridet, with a sinister smile, as he seated himself on Brossin's stool.

" Well, sir," began M. de Champtocé, " I hope that this conversation will be the last that we shall ever have together. So pray listen to me attentively, and interrupt me as little as possible. At the time of our last interview at the Schweizerhof, I explained to you very clearly my intentions as to the future, and you promised to obey the orders which I gave you. It was agreed, that evening, that when called upon you should ask for Mademoiselle Brossin's hand, and also, give evidence before a magistrate in a matter respecting which I was to give you further information."

" Probably that of the forgery committed by Monsieur Alfred, my future brother-in-law," said Noridet with an ironical grimace.

" You have plenty of acumen, but let me finish. I agreed that when you had done all this, you should be allowed to leave France forever. The time has come to do so."

The assassin could scarcely believe that he heard aright. Alcamo—or rather the marquis—must certainly be ignorant of his having set fire to Fritz's hut. " I am ready to leave," he replied, eagerly, for he felt only too glad to get off so easily.

" I will add that you need not keep the second promise," said M. de Champtocé. " It will suffice for you to marry Mademoiselle Brossin."

" I will marry her, although at the time of my promise I was ignorant of the situation of her respectable father, and no less honourable brother."

" I am constrained to say that no other marriage could be better suited to you," replied the marquis with withering contempt.

" Be it so," muttered Noridet, wincing under the insult, " but at least when once I am in a foreign country, you will agree to leave me in peace."

" No doubt ; only I have revoked my decision as to letting you have your uncle's fortune, for at that time arson did not figure among your crimes."

This blow was the harder to bear as it was unexpected. " You have no proof of any such thing, you cannot have any," cried Noridet.

" I know that you burnt down Fritz's hut, and that a poor disfigured fellow perished in the river. You thought me dead also, but you see I am alive. Oh ! it was artfully contrived. While I was going a roundabout way in a vehicle, you followed a shorter route on foot. But as to proofs in this respect, that is of no matter, for I have proofs of your earlier crimes in

my possession, and, if needful, I shall make use of them. For the present, the only punishment which I shall inflict will be to deprive you of your inheritance."

"What ! you will bring forward the will ?" cried Noridet, wildly.

"I certainly shall."

"Then death is better ! I prefer suicide to poverty. At least, by killing myself I shall avoid marrying that charming person whom you force upon me."

"Who told you that I meant to reduce you to poverty ?" said the marquis, haughtily. "Mademoiselle Brossin has a dowry of a million, and her husband will still be able to cut a figure in a German, Swiss, or Italian town." A strange gleam now came into Noridet's eyes. "However," continued M. de Champtocé, as though he could read the thoughts of the scamp before him, "Mademoiselle Brossin will only receive the income from this million, and, on the day of her death, the husband who has the misfortune to lose her will fall from fifty thousand francs' income a year to nothing whatever."

Noridet hung his head without replying. He was thinking how he might retain the money derived from his uncle's property. "Now, another word and one more warning," said his judge, gravely. "'Monsieur Lugos' and 'Count d'Alcarno' no longer exist, nor 'Jean of the Cliffs,' either. I am the Marquis de Champtocé, and I am also the friend and protector of Monsieur Jean de Monville. Remember that ; it is your only chance for indulgence."

Was there any hope to be gleaned from these last words ? Noridet was about to ask, when all desire to say any thing more was put an end to by the marquis exclaiming : "Now go, sir ! Bernard, whom you also attempted to murder, is waiting to take you to the park gate."

### XXXI.

It was dawn, and amid the early sun rays the park, in which rose the new Manor of Champtocé, looked unusually gay. The towers, the frontage, and the ogival windows were lighted up, while the leaden roof shone like a mirror, and the dew on the lawn in front glittered like diamond spray. Even the pines planted near by for the sake of local colour had a brighter hue.

People passing along the Boulevard d'Italie, and glancing through the gateway, must have envied the peaceful, happy existence of the man who owned this fair domain : for there was no longer the slightest trace of that gloominess with which Noridet and Brossin had been so much struck at night time. The feudal castle, which in the moonlight reminded one of some dark romance by Anne Radcliffe, was transformed by the sun into a gay modern building. As if to complete this change, the marquis, dressed like a planter, that is to say, in a linen jacket and a straw hat, was walking up and down, and smoking a pipe, among the rose bushes which Bernard the groom was watering with a zeal which proved his partiality for gardening. Their respective occupations did not interfere with their conversation, which was lively and animated.

"Well, my old friend, we have reached port," said M. de Champtocé, gaily. "After the winter sailing and last night's storm, I confess that I did not expect to reach land so safely."

"Don't let us rejoice too soon, marquis," replied Bernard, "the anchorage isn't very secure."

"Bah! what do you fear now? My accounts are settled with all those rascals. They are unable to injure me, and I can walk with my head high. If you only knew what it was for me to be obliged to live amid all those intrigues, and to have to lay traps for all those scoundrels! I, who had always done everything openly, I felt myself degraded at having to employ cunning, to use the habitual weapons of Jacques Brossin, François Bouscareau, Jules Noridet, and their fellows."

"Ah, sir, anything was allowable against creatures like those, and I am very much afraid that you disarmed too soon."

"You forget that I still hold them, and that, if they dare begin their tricks again, it will be easy for me to crush them."

"Perhaps, so, but, for the time being, they have got off cheap. Jacques, for example, the scoundrel who denied his master and robbed him, how is he punished? By having a husband for his daughter, and a dowry for her as well."

"He is ruined, however."

"He was already ruined, and how do I know that you don't mean even to spare him failure?"

"No, I shall let him become a bankrupt. Ill-gotten gold must not be allowed to profit him; but do you know, my old Bernard, I did not like to see Henriette weep for her brother, although I had never esteemed her? Still she had nothing to do with her father's misdeeds. You know very well, yourself, that, if you had been appealed to in Louise's name, as she appealed to me in the name of my daughter, you would have yielded just the same."

"Yes, but that miserable Alfred, that rascally puppy who insulted my daughter at the races, and who has done all sorts of mischief, he ought not to have been suffered to go scot-free."

"I admit that, and, in fact, I have only suspended the execution of the sentence, for, although I have set him at liberty, I hold the notes on which he forged Noridet's signature, and I shall at any time be able to produce them, if he does not do as I wish. By the bye, how did things go on in the vault?"

"Ah, sir, it was odd enough, I assure you! I began by releasing young Brossin, and if you could only have seen his face as I took him across the park! I believed he thought that he was going to the scaffold, and at any other time I should have laughed at him, but I remained quiet, and simply pushed him out into the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette."

"Without saying anything to him?"

"Oh, no! I told him in a very loud voice that it would be a bad matter for him if he ever came here again; and, thereupon, he didn't wait to hear any more. I think that he cannot have stopped running yet."

"Good; and the two rascals whom we caught with him, what of them?"

"That is a different matter, and we had better be on our guard against them."

"Why? They won't be tempted to come here again, surely."

"Perhaps, not, but just fancy, sir, after listening to my little speech in which I informed them that my master was willing to let them off this time, and that they were free to go and get hanged somewhere else, they quietly replied: 'Oh! we are let off on account of the "swell" who was caught with us; it's not worth while to thank your master for us. But when we get the address of that young idiot who has just run off, we'll make him pay up whatever we please.'"



"Yes," said M. de Champtocé, "you are right. Those scamps might turn this thing to account by making young Brossin give them money, still they won't have time for that. Before a month has elapsed, Monsieur Jules Noridet will have to leave France with his wife and his wife's family."

"You will have great difficulty in forcing him to do so," said Bernard, shaking his head.

"I defy him to resist me now, and you won't accuse me of weakness as regards him, for this very morning I shall place Monsieur de Mathis's will—the one which he signed—in my notary's hands—and Jules, completely ruined by this step, will certainly find nothing better to do than marry—in fact, he will be glad to take Mademoiselle Brossin and her fifty thousand francs' income."

"Derived from François Bouscareau's million. There is another fellow on whom it will be as well to keep an eye."

"Be easy as to that. I sha'n't fail to do so, and shall make him cross the frontier as well. With the forty thousand francs which I shall hand him, as an act of charity, he will be able to go and set up as a money-lender in Germany."

"What if he takes it into his head to sue you, and tell the story of the pocket-book in court?"

"I defy him to do that: he has too many sins upon his head to brave public opinion, and if he dared to adopt such a course, I should have no trouble in silencing him. Who will believe that he could have saved a million out of his salary as a cashier, and that I took a million from him when I have ten of my own already?"

The groom said no more, but he did not appear to be quite convinced. "You forget," resumed his master, smiling, "that Monsieur Lugos and Monsieur d'Alcamo are dead, and that in place of those somewhat mysterious gentlemen there is the Marquis Albert de Champtocé, belonging to one of the oldest of the noble families of France, and possessing an immense fortune honourably acquired by twenty years of toil and peril. No more mysteries. No more dark plots! I can live to love Andrée, and make her happy. The monsters who have persecuted her must disappear. If they breathed the same air as my daughter breathes I should not be at ease."

M. de Champtocé spoke with so much warmth and enthusiasm that Bernard was quite won over. "Heaven hear you, sir!" said he, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Let us leave all this; let us forget those vile scamps, and think only of the happiness of our children, yours and mine. Do you know, Bernard, that I wish them to be married on the same day?"

"Ah! I shall be the happiest of men. But Fortoto's mother, to whom he imagines that he owes a debt of gratitude, has forbidden his going to her house, and refuses to sanction his marriage with Louise."

The marquis could not refrain from smiling at the thought of the old sorceress and her objections to the young girl whom she so hated. "Oh!" said he, "she will change her mind when I have spoken to her. I have a deal to do to-day, but I will see her to-morrow. I must first see Franchard this morning, and give him the will signed by Monsieur de Mathis, and then introduce Jean to Monsieur Mornac, and then—"

The marquis stopped short; his emotion apparently prevented him from speaking. "Ah! I guess it," joyously exclaimed Bernard. "You are impatient to enjoy your happiness, and you wish to tell everything to Mademoiselle Andrée to-night!"

"I will tell you my plan as to that. I want Madame de Mathis to be present. I must see Jean to begin with. Where is he? He is usually up before daylight and in the garden."

"Monsieur de Monville must have come home late last night," replied Bernard.

"Ah! yes. I asked him to stay away all the evening, so that he might not meet Brossin and his accomplices, and I suspect that he wandered round Monsieur Mornac's house till a late hour," said the marquis, laughing. "That is the way lovers always do."

"He is very fond of walking about the grove near the little gate. If you like, sir, I will go and see if he is there."

"Let us go together, Bernard," said M. de Champtocé, walking towards the trees.

The groom laid down his watering-pot and followed his master, but they had not taken ten steps when they met a mournful procession. The marquis's servants were carrying a young man whose face was not visible. M. de Champtocé felt angry. He was annoyed that, in spite of his formal orders, his servants should have ventured to bring a stranger into the grounds. The deplorable condition of this man, whom they were forced to carry, failed, in the eyes of the marquis, to excuse the liberty they had taken, for he was very strict in such matters, and so he went straight towards the group to order them back. However, Bernard, who had gone on before his master, warned him of the mistake he was about to make. "Monsieur Jean!" cried the old groom, running towards the wounded man.

M. de Champtocé then quickly darted forward in his turn, and after pushing aside the bearers, he bent down over the young man, who appeared to have met with a serious accident, for his light hair was clotted with blood, and his clothes very much torn, as though he had had a dreadful struggle with some antagonist. "Jean! my friend! my boy! what is the matter? what has happened? Speak to me! answer me!" cried the marquis, in agony.

The wounded man opened his eyes, and murmured faintly: "It is nothing—I am—better—but I feared that I should never see you again."

The marquis was about to question his servants, when an active little woman suddenly appeared. She had hitherto been hidden by one of the footmen, but she now made up for lost time by the rapidity with which she talked. "Poor young man!" she cried, "but for me he would have died for loss of blood, for I picked him up myself in a ditch on the Boulevard d'Italie. I should have taken him to my house, but I wasn't strong enough; but as I knew the entrance of your château in the Rue de Croulebarbe, I ran at once to let your servants know of what had happened. However, I took care to call to a labourer who was working on the boulevard to watch over the young gentleman while I was gone."

This benevolent person would never have stopped talking had not M. de Champtocé checked the flow of her eloquence. "Who are you, madame?" he asked, making a sign to the bearers to go on.

"My name is Madame Roubion," said the little woman, somewhat startled by this formal reception. "I and my husband keep the café called the 'Friends' Meeting-place,' over there on the right, at the top of the hill, and I flatter myself that everybody round about here knows us."

She then took a step as if anxious to follow the group formed by Jean and the servants, but the marquis prevented this, and resumed: "I do not doubt your respectability, madame, or your kindness, but this young man

needs quiet above all things, and to my mind the presence of strangers in a sick-room is always objectionable."

"Very well. I understand. You order me off," said the woman, turning as red as a poppy.

"Not at all," said the marquis, gently; "I am too much obliged to you to wish to be disagreeable, and I shall go and thank you at your own house. Meantime you won't refuse this," he added, slipping a bank-note into Madame Roubion's hand, so folded as to let the word "thousand" be seen.

Madame Roubion's sulky airs did not hold out against the magic influence of this talisman. "You are too kind, sir—my lord—and what I did was not in hope of payment," she stammered, as she slipped the precious paper into her bosom, promising herself that she would not let Roubion, her rough husband, know of it. "Perhaps, as you say, it would be better not to tire the young man—what a pity it will be if he does not recover. Such a handsome young fellow!"

"You may be sure, madame, that he will have all the care he requires," said the marquis, hastening towards the little door of the park, while the woman followed him without turning round. "May I ask you how it happens," resumed M. de Champtocé, "that you came straight to this place for help? My young friend lives with me, but a less intelligent person than yourself, madame, would have taken him to the hospital, and I am greatly obliged to you for sparing us the pain of that."

"The hospital! No danger of my sending him there!" cried the little woman. "I have seen him pass by too often in his tilbury not to know that he was Monsieur de Mouville, the millionaire. The hospital, indeed! That would have been a nice thing to do!"

"You knew his name, then?" said the marquis, quickly.

"Certainly I did! There's nothing surprising in that. There are not many noblemen near the Boulevard d'Italie. They're not here in dozens."

"This is the way when persons think that no one knows them!" thought Jean's protector; "fortunately, I no longer need to surround myself with so much mystery."

"I know other people beside him," resumed the talkative woman; "I have often seen the old gentleman, who must be his papa, with the pretty girl—that is his sweetheart, I suppose! Won't she be distressed? But I never saw *you* before, sir."

"I only came to my friend's house a couple of days ago," said M. de Champtocé, very quietly; "but here we are at the entrance of the park," he added, pointing to the little door, which had just opened from the inside; "excuse my leaving you, madame. I must go and see our patient, and I promise you that I will call, in the course of the day, and let you know how he is getting on."

"I shall be very happy to see you, sir," said the little woman, as she passed out into the Rue du Champ de l'Alouette.

"Yes," muttered the marquis to himself, "I shall go, if only to stop your talking."

As soon as the door had closed upon the visitor, he ran off to catch up with the group ahead of him. However, his walk across the park, in company with Madame Roubion had lasted some little time, and the bearers had already placed the wounded man in friendly hands when M. de Champtocé reached the courtyard, which separated the feudal manor from the modern dwelling.

"He is better, and it won't be serious," said Bernard.

"Then Heaven means to spare us new sufferings, now that we are beginning to be happy," exclaimed the marquis. And as he spoke, he repaired, in all haste, to Jean's room.

A touching and comforting sight awaited him. At the end of a simple but elegantly furnished room, Jean lay upon a divan, and Louise Bernard, kneeling beside him, was bathing his blood-stained face, while Fortoto held his head. M. de Champtocé hastened to Jean's side, and saw at once that his wounds were not likely to prove dangerous. The young fellow's colour had returned, and his eyes had grown bright once more. "In Heaven's name, my dear boy, what has happened to you? How did this come about?" asked the marquis, eagerly.

"It is nothing," said Fortoto; "he must have fallen, and his head struck upon a sharp stone, but the effect was only to stun him for a time, and there is no more danger to be feared; head-wounds always kill at once, or else they are of no consequence."

"Oh! I'm not suffering now," said the wounded man, holding out his hand to his friend.

"Still, I shall send for a doctor," said the marquis.

"It is quite unnecessary. The care I have already had, and the delight of seeing you once more, have done me more good than anything else could do. I deeply regret," added Jean, looking with filial affection at his protector, "that I have caused you a moment's uneasiness."

"But you must tell me everything."

"I will. I went, as you may have guessed, to take a stroll near Monsieur Mornac's house. I saw the light in Andrée's room, and that made me feel very happy."

"And you stayed looking at it all night."

"Oh, it wasn't extinguished till two in the morning, and then I came away."

"But who hurt you like this?"

"Why, just as I reached the Boulevard d'Italie, two rough-looking fellows threw themselves upon me."

"Great Powers!" cried Bernard, "I believe they were the rascally thieves whom I set free."

"Well, I believe that they would have killed me between them if Providence had not sent someone to my help. A defender came up."

"A defender!" repeated M. de Champtocé. "Who was it?"

"It is a very strange story, especially the part that relates to him."

"But why did he leave you after saving your life?" said M. de Champtocé. "It seems to me that he might have helped you up, or have taken you to the nearest house, instead of leaving you unconscious in a deserted street."

"That is where the mystery lies."

"Mystery or not, it was very unworthy conduct."

"All that I can say is that I most certainly owe him my life. Besides, I believe that his intention was to wait near me until someone came."

"That is a strange way to help people," muttered Fortoto, who was listening attentively. Bernard and his daughter looked as much surprised as the marquis.

"My dear boy," said M. de Champtocé to Jean, "all this is very unaccountable, and I beg of you to explain yourself more clearly, unless, indeed, it tires you."

"No, no, I can speak and I will tell you everything."

Jean had now succeeded in raising himself into a sitting posture. His face was pale, and his long curly hair and bare throat gave him the look of some Lacedæmonian soldier as represented in antique statuary, at once vigorous and delicate in outline. Since he had left the Biville cliffs his manly comeliness as well as his manners had changed. The wild youth, who ran about barefooted among the rocks now looked like some scion of the English aristocracy, and spoke with a composure and correctness which contrasted strangely with his former abrupt and almost fierce speech. The blood of the companions of William the Conqueror had descended in full purity to the veins of this last representative of a proud and valiant race, and if the Barons of Monville could have risen from the tomb, they would have recognised their descendant with pride.

"Well, I had been walking for an hour outside Monsieur Mornac's house," resumed Jean. "Night was getting on, and the street was almost deserted. I did not look at the people who passed by, for, as I told you, I was gazing at the light in Andrée's window which shone athwart the trees. I was leaning against the gate and did not stir for a long time; but suddenly a vehicle drove past so close to the curb and with such a rattle that I involuntarily turned. In doing so I caught sight of a man who stood ten paces from me and whom I had not previously remarked. He stood motionless, half hidden by the projecting jambs of a carriage entrance, and I thought, that, like myself, he was gazing at Monsieur Mornac's house. When the vehicle had passed by, I wished to ascertain if this were the case, and so I went towards the stranger; but as soon as he saw me approach he slowly retired, keeping near the houses. I thought I might be mistaken, that this watcher was simply some homeless beggar, or a fellow who had been druiking at some tavern and was belated, so I ceased looking at him, returned to my post and again fell into a reverie."

"And the man came back?" asked M. de Champtocé, whom the narrative seemed to interest.

"Very slowly, and he did not come so near to me as before. He pretended to turn the corner of a side street, then he stopped, and began slowly walking back, loitering outside each door. At last, after half an hour's manœuvring of this kind, he had almost returned to the same spot as previously. I could not doubt his intentions any longer. He was evidently there to watch some one or something, and his pertinacity began to awaken my curiosity. Still I was too much engrossed in what interested my heart and mind alike to pay much attention to him. I thought that he must be either a thief or a detective, both of whom belong to a class of people who are very indifferent as to the sorrows of lovers, and I soon forgot that I was not alone in the street."

"That was a great mistake, my boy: a spy ought always to be looked upon with suspicion. You ought to have fallen at once upon this fellow, have taken him by the collar, and asked him what he meant by being there."

"I had almost made up my mind, at one moment, to do so, for I saw that he did not stir. But, just then, the light at the window went out. My fair visions fled, and I returned abruptly to reality. I went off without looking behind me, for now that my star had vanished, it mattered little to me whether the man remained on the spot or not. It was time to return home; I had just heard two o'clock strike at a church clock near by."

"And you had the imprudence to walk back alone through a neighbourhood like this?" exclaimed M. de Champtocé.

"I did not even think of taking a cab. The night was magnificent, and the air mild. My heart was full of hope and joy. I went along in a dream, walking without looking about me, and careless as to whether I went out of my way or not; I liked walking under the starry heavens in the solitary streets, and I instinctively went up a broad avenue, at the end of which there is a monument."

"That was the Observatory, no doubt; but at such an hour, when there is no one in the streets, this trip was an act of folly."

"I was thinking so little of robbers, that I do not believe I once turned my head until I had reached the wide boulevards planted with old trees which lead here, and where I like to stroll. When I got there, I knew my way at once, and I felt certain that I was going right, but, just then, I saw that I was followed. Behind me I heard a step which was regulated on mine, and I saw a man gliding along by the wall, twenty paces in the rear. By the light of the first lamp he passed, I recognised him."

"It was the man who had been watching Monsieur Mornae's house!" exclaimed the marquis.

"It was, and I could not mistake him for a mere passer-by, as the strangeness of his attire had previously struck me. He wore a cloak with a hood raised above his head, and as it was very warm, the pains which he thus took to cover himself seemed unaccountable."

"He was hiding his face, and this must have seemed suspicious to you."

"It did, indeed, seem strange, and I at first thought of accosting him, but I concluded that the man must simply be a police-agent on his rounds. I remembered having met fellows of the kind going about with the hoods of their cloaks over their heads."

"A policeman wouldn't have amused himself with following you beyond his beat."

"I didn't reflect. I turned into the avenue, and began to walk faster. The stranger probably did the same, for when I again looked he was at the same distance behind me, as he had been before. This began to annoy me, and I went towards the obstinate fellow, determined to ask him what he meant by all this, and make him explain himself, as well as to forbid him to follow me any longer."

"That was the best thing to do."

"Yes, but as soon as this strange chap saw me coming towards him, he turned and ran away in the most cowardly manner. I was really tempted to laugh at such cowardice, and I said to myself that I needn't have worried myself about a man who ran away like that. Well, I resumed my stroll, determined not to pay this timid spy the compliment of looking at him again. After half an hour's walk, I had entirely forgotten him, but, just as I reached the Boulevard d'Italie, I met two other fellows—"

"I can guess the rest," said Bernard. "You must have come up just as our two rascally thieves left by the little gate."

"All that I can tell you is that I was turning into the Rue du Champ de l'Aloutte, when I was seized by the throat. The assault was so sudden, so unforeseen, and so violent that I could not tell where I was. I had closed my eyes and was thrown upon my back before I knew what was happening to me. I was suffocating, for there was a knee upon my chest, still I felt that two hands were rifling my pockets."

"There can be no doubt that it was those fellows—young Monsieur Brossin's friends," said the old groom.

"When I recovered my breath," continued Jean, who was at a loss to understand Bernard's remark, "I heard people talking near me in a language which I could not comprehend, although I caught some French words here and there."

"It was Paris slang, which is familiar to such wretches," said Louise's father.

"I felt sure that the robbers were deliberating as to whether they should dispatch me or not, and I thought that they finally decided to kill me when a man called out to me: 'Courage! I'm coming!'"

"It was the stranger who had followed you from the Mornacs?"

"Himself, and I assure you that he ran the risk of losing his life in defending me. The two thieves being vigorously assailed with a stick he held, let go their hold on me and resisted, but my companion used his cudgel so well that finally they took flight, fairly beaten. I was saved, and I was trying to rise up to thank the brave fellow to whom I owed my life, when I felt myself becoming unconscious, and I fell backward near the ditch on the side of the road where the robbers had thrown me down. Their conqueror knelt and bent over me to help me up, and I then saw that he was masked."

"Masked!" exclaimed M. de Champtocé, in amazement; "it is impossible, my dear boy, you must be mistaken."

"No! no!" repeated Jean, "I am quite sure of it. He had raised the hood of his cloak over his head, but this precaution did not suffice to hide his face which was partly covered by a band of linen. I only saw his eyes, which were singularly brilliant, and his pale forehead furrowed with deep wrinkles."

"This is very strange!" muttered the marquis.

"I need not tell you," resumed Jean, "that I thanked him warmly, and asked his name; but, instead of answering me, he rose up, gazed around in all directions, and seemed to be looking for some one to come to his help. The dawn was at hand, and, at the spot where I had fallen, the view extended all along the boulevard, but no one was in sight, and the clatter of the thieves escaping across the waste ground in the direction of the barrière was the only thing to be heard."

"You should have called out, and we should have heard you, for we were in the park with Bernard."

"I had not the strength to do so, as suffocation was followed by giddiness, caused by the violent shock I had received, for in my fall, my head struck a sharp flint, and it was bleeding profusely."

"When I think that you might have been killed, and all because you were so imprudent!" exclaimed the marquis.

"I have fallen many times on the cliffs," interrupted Jean, smiling, "and my skull must be impenetrable. Still I felt very weak, and all I could manage was to ask my champion to go and summon you. 'I live there,' said I to him, 'beyond that wall, behind those tall trees, and I beg of you to go round by this street,' I added, pointing out the way. He seemed to me to look attentively at the park gate, but he did not comply, although he still endeavoured to stanch the blood from my wound. I again begged of him to let you know what had happened, and told him how to find the entrance. I ended by telling him, also, my name, and yours. He

listened with great attention, and then I saw him start, but he kept perfectly silent."

"Why didn't I do as I thought of doing for a moment? I thought of going to the little gate to look for you," said M. de Champtocé; "I should then have seen this man, and I should have learnt who he was."

"The effort which I had made to speak exhausted me," interrupted Jean. "I closed my eyes, and the torpor which followed prevented me from knowing very clearly what went on around me. I felt the stranger's hand upon my heart, as though he were trying to find out whether it still beat. At times, it seemed to me that he left me to take a few steps along the street. I have since thought that he was looking for some passer-by in whose care he might leave me, for he stamped as if with impatience."

"He did not remain with you till the last moment, however, for you were brought here by a woman and the servants."

"As nearly as I can guess, some time must have elapsed between the moment when I lost consciousness and that when this woman came up, for when I opened my eyes I saw that it was daylight, and it was barely dawn when I was attacked."

"It was nearly five o'clock when the servants brought you here."

"Well, what occurred was this: I was roused from my stupor by my defender calling for help with all his might. He called out: 'Help, madame, help!' and I almost immediately heard hurried steps approaching. Still I did not expect that the arrival of the person whom he had summoned would put him to flight."

"What! did he then go off?"

"He waited until the woman was near enough to see that I was lying upon the ground, and was probably wounded. Then he bent over me and said rapidly: 'Here comes some one; you do not need me now. Farewell!'"

"And then?" asked Jean's friends in chorus.

"Then he took my hand, pressed it warmly, and ran off as fast as he could."

"Without having shown his face?" asked M. de Champtocé.

"Without having removed his mask; but the daylight having dawned, I saw, in spite of his hood, that his complexion was of a singular colour. His forehead was livid, and his eyes, which were dreadfully sunken, had something almost frightful in their expression."

"I am almost tempted to believe—but no—it is impossible," murmured the marquis.

"This abrupt departure surprised me so much that I thought I must be dreaming," resumed Jean.

"He must have had serious reasons for running away like that," said Bernard.

"That was the first remark made by the woman whom he had summoned. When she came up and saw my bloody face, she began crying out: 'Murder?' and shaking her fist at the fugitive and indulging in many offensive epithets. Then came a torrent of questions and remarks, which showed me that she felt certain she had saved me from instant death by putting my murderer to flight. I tried to prove to her that she was quite mistaken, but I was too weak to talk, and I let her chatter on, intending to explain matters later."

"But she did what she could, I hope," said M. de Champtocé.



"Yes, and in point of fact, I think that she is an excellent woman, but if I had been disposed to laugh she would have made me do so."

"How?"

"She was so comical, divided between the desire to run after the fellow whom she took for a malefactor and the charitable impulse which urged her to assist me! At last her good heart carried the day. She laid down the basket which she was carrying to market, I suppose, and took out some napkins with which she bound up the wound on my head, and, of course, she talked away all the time with a lavish use of frivolous words; still while I felt greatly obliged to her for her attentions, I only thought of getting home as fast as possible, and I had just opened my mouth to tell her how to manage the matter, when she stopped me by exclaiming: 'Good gracious! why, it is the handsome young man who drives about in the tilbury!'"

In spite of his anxiety at hearing so strange a story, M. de Champtocé could not refrain from smiling at the simple-minded admiration of Madame Roubion.

"I did not at first know what she meant," resumed Jean, "but she explained to me with great volubility that she had often seen me ride by, that she knew my name, the true entrance to the park, and all who live here, and—"

"Yes, she said the same to me," interrupted the marquis, "and it is very fortunate that we are no longer obliged to live in mystery, for our *incognito* could not hold out for long against her curiosity."

"I think so myself," continued the wounded man, "and I derived an unfavourable impression from certain allusions which she made in the midst of her tattle, but it was no time to ask her what she meant, and when I saw that she was so well informed I thought that the best course was to send her here to let you know what had happened."

"Oh, in justice to her, I must say," remarked Bernard, "that she did know where to find the Rue Croulebarbe entrance, and she made such a noise at the door that she started up all the servants."

"Yes, it is very fortunate that you were not there to hear her, Monsieur le Marquis," said Fortoto, "you would have been dreadfully alarmed, for she talked of nothing but death and assassination."

"Before she left me to call you she asked a road-mender, who had just come up, to stay beside me," said Jean.

"Was there no one else near by?"

"I think not."

"Then, say nothing," rejoined the marquis, "about all this to any one who may question you."

"I am afraid that the little woman will chatter. Her coffee-house is the meeting-place of all the gossiping women and bad fellows in this neighbourhood," said Bernard.

"I will go to see her in the course of the day, and I shall know how to make her hold her tongue," was the reply. "Besides, I wish to find Jean's champion, and I may have some chance of meeting him near Monsieur Mornac's house. I hope that you will soon be all right again, my dear friend," added the marquis, as he rose and pressed Jean's hand tenderly, "for I wish to be able to tell Monsieur Mornac, that you will soon call upon him."

At this moment the door softly opened, and a servant came in. "Your notary is waiting to see you, Monsieur le Marquis," said he.

"Monsieur Franchard ! what can he want with me so early in the morning ?" replied M. de Champtocé. "Come, Jean, cheer up, this visit may perhaps hasten your happiness."

"The notary isn't alone, sir," now said the servant.

"Ah ! he has brought his clerk, then ? I sent him word that I wished to see him about Monsieur de Mathis's will, and he has come no doubt to save me the trouble of going to his place."

"The person with him is an old gentleman," added the servant, respectfully.

"That is strange ! Well, I will go to see who it is. Good-bye, for a while," said M. de Champtocé to Jean, and thereupon he went off to find out the meaning of the early call.

He found M. Franchard in a room full of works of art, and was surprised to see that his companion was M. Mornac, to whom he had never told his true name or address. As for M. Franchard—M. Mornac's successor in his practice—he was a good specimen of the young Parisian notary. Tall, slender, florid, and fresh, dressed with correctness and elegance combined, he looked like a young dandy, and one could hardly picture him taking down the last wishes of a dying man or drawing up the clauses of a marriage contract. His apparent worldliness did not, however, impair his professional merits which were appreciated by all who knew him. Indeed, M. Mornac was wont to say that his successor had no need to put on a white tie to show his elders how to settle the most difficult questions. "Monsieur le Marquis," said this model of notaries, "I should not have taken the liberty of calling here at so early an hour had you not informed me that you intended coming to my office to-day. I thought that it would be better to spare you such a long journey, and—"

"You did well, sir, and I am always charmed to see you," replied M. de Champtocé, holding out his hand to M. Franchard, and bowing cordially to M. Mornac.

"I should have asked my friend and successor to introduce me," said Mornac, with a nervousness which the marquis could not account for, "if I had not had the honour of already seeing you at my house—Monsieur—Monsieur—"

M. Mornac evidently hesitated as to what title and name he should bestow upon M. de Champtocé, and the marquis began to guess the cause of his nervousness, and even the motive of his visit.

"I cannot thank you enough, sir," said he, "for your kindness in coming to see me. I so little hoped that you would do so, that it is a double pleasure, for you have serious reasons to reproach me."

"Why, sir ?"

"Well, it is not customary to present one's self at anybody's house under a false name, and I was guilty of doing so when I called myself 'Count d'Alcamo.' My real title is Marquis de Champtocé."

"So my young friend Franchard tells me, and now that I understand it clearly, I shall not mix up the two titles."

"My title is of no consequence," said M. de Champtocé, "providing that you believe in my grateful friendship for you."

"I am greatly flattered by it, I assure you, although I do not know how I have deserved the friendship of a nobleman of high rank."

"Oh, how can you say that when you welcomed, loved, and protected my dear Andrée."

"Ah ! now we are coming to the point."

"What do you mean, pray?"

"I mean that I have come to see you about Mademoiselle Salazie. The other night after your visit I had a scene with Madame Mornac; who, although she bade you good-bye right pleasantly, and asked you to call again, declared that the statements you made respecting Andrée's father were unheard of, except in novels; besides, she found fault with me for agreeing to receive your young friend, Monsieur de Monville. Nothing would content her, but that I should call this morning upon Monsieur Franchard to make inquiries."

"I hope that they were satisfactory."

"I beg you to believe, Monsieur le Marquis," said the young notary, laughing, "that I had no difficulty whatever in convincing my dear predecessor of your honourability."

"Oh, as to that, all that I learned was highly satisfactory; a princely fortune, well secured, and very honourably acquired; an excellent reputation; aristocratic birth; old and respected family. All this surpassed my expectations. But—"

"But what?"

"We could not agree as to your title. I called you Count d'Alcamo, whereas, Franchard said that you were the Marquis de Champtocé. I had called to inquire about a Sicilian nobleman, and he praised a nobleman who was as French as possible, and born in Anjou. We should never have come to an understanding, had I not happened to mention Monsieur Jean de Monville's name. I then made inquiries about him, as you wished to bring him to see my wife and André, but I could not get at anything positive."

"I told Monsieur Mornac, and I showed him papers to prove it," interrupted M. Franchard, "that Monsieur de Monville had enough capital to become one of the largest landowners in France."

"But what I wish to know is this," said M. Mornac, persistently, "what is there in common between your young friend and the lad whom I met last autumn near my farm, and who was also named Jean de Monville, or, at least, so he asserted?"

"They are one and the same," said M. de Champtocé, smiling.

"Well, it is strange, indeed, that a ragamuffin like that young fellow who was accused of having had something to do with your own mysterious disappearance, should now reappear as a millionaire, and be patronized by you. I knew he had escaped from prison, but you will admit that a person has reason to be surprised by all this."

"I presume that Madame Mornac remembers that it was this ragamuffin who saved her life?"

"Yes, she has not forgotten that, nor has Andrée, unfortunately."

"Unfortunately?"

"Yes, a hundred times yes, for this adventure has had sad consequences, and I can confess it to a gentleman like yourself. You may, perhaps, have guessed it already. Our dear Andrée has a creole imagination, and on account of the peril which she escaped, she became interested in this young fellow to an extraordinary degree."

"And her interest in him has resisted time, absence, and even slander?" said the marquis.

"Yes, and my wife has been powerless to overcome it. She tried in every possible way to divert Andrée's mind; indeed, that was why we went to Switzerland. Still the dear girl has always been melancholy since Jean

disappeared, and she has always maintained that he would come back, and declared that she would never marry any other man. She fancied that it was he who saved her life on the Rhine. We knew this to be false, but we had great difficulty in making her think so. Madame Mornac even went so far as to reproach her for having so soon forgotten her betrothed, Monsieur de Kergas, who died less than a year ago from eating some of the mushrooms which caused the death of my poor Mathis. Andréc replied, however, that she had never loved Monsieur de Kergas, although she should have considered herself bound to marry him had he not died. From all this you can understand that your visit on the day before yesterday threw oil upon the flames, as it were."

"Yes," murmured M. de Champtocé, as if talking to himself, "I ought not to have tortured her by uncertainty. I ought to have told her everything, but that day it was impossible. I still had to accomplish my task of vengeance."

M. Mornac did not listen to what the marquis was muttering, but continued: "Andrée has not had a moment's calmness since you came. She doesn't eat or sleep, and our doctor, who takes care of her poor godmother, tells us that this nervousness can't continue without danger to the dear girl. Now, do you blame me for making all these inquiries?"

"I have not once thought of blaming you," said the marquis, deeply touched by the strong feeling M. Mornac evinced, "and now I even thank you for showing me that it is time to have done with all these mysteries which torture Andrée."

"It seems to me," remarked M. Franchard, who was very desirous of making himself agreeable to his noble client, "that there is not the slightest obscurity in all this. Your ward, my dear Monsieur Mornac, has certainly not misplaced her affections, since Monsieur Jean de Monville, to my certain knowledge, has more than a hundred thousand francs' income in good securities—"

"Why do you tell me all that?" exclaimed M. Mornac, angrily, "you, Franchard, my pupil and my friend? Why talk to me of money when I am merely anxious to find out the origin and antecedents of the young man whom my adopted daughter wishes to marry, in spite of my wishes. I consider Andrée to be my daughter, do you hear? What do I care for your good securities and hundreds of thousands of francs of income? Andrée doesn't need all that, but she does need to know where her husband comes from and what is the true source of his fortune. We understood, in my time, that it was a notary's business to find out such things before anything else, let me tell you, my worthy successor?"

"But, my dear master," replied the young notary, somewhat taken aback, "I understand it as you do, and, if I mentioned Monsieur de Monville's fortune, it was only because that as regards other matters the marquis offered to tell you whatever you might wish to know."

Once started, Mornac was not to be stayed, and, again turning to Franchard, he burst forth as follows: "I don't see how you can say that there is nothing obscure in all this. Here is a young girl who has fallen in love with a poor lad who barely had a roof over his head, and this young fellow who used to run about the cliffs is all of a sudden transformed into the rich heir of a noble lord whom no one knows anything about. The same girl passes for an orphan, and one fine day she is told that her father is alive, and is about to reappear; when, nobody knows, but no matter; besides, this father is rolling in millions, just like Jack of the Cliffs, and he presents

a fortune to the young girl whom he has abandoned for fifteen years and more."

On hearing this, M. de Champtocé could not repress a groan of pain, but it did not check the old notary, who went on: "Yes, all this inbroglie, all this scene-shifting might do very well on the stage; but in sober daily life it is too much of a good thing, and I am fairly tired of it. It distresses me, and I want to know what it all means!"

This peroration was followed by an embarrassing silence. M. Franchard feared that his respectable predecessor had gone much too far, and might offend his noble client. M. Mornac himself began to feel somewhat ashamed of having spoken with so much violence before a man of the world. The marquis had his head lowered, and seemed to be reflecting. "You are right, sir," he at last said, slowly; "Andrée's guardian has a right to know everything, and I will tell you everything."

"It will perhaps be difficult," replied M. Mornac, "to tell me all that I wish to ask."

"You cannot be too exacting," said the marquis, "when Andrée's future happiness is in question."

M. Mornac's face brightened. "You intend, then," said he, "to tell me all about this young man's past, and the origin of his fortune?"

"Not only that, but I want your decision, Madame Mornac's and Andrée's, to be taken in full knowledge of all the circumstances."

"What did I tell you?" cried the young notary in a triumphant tone. "You see that Monsieur de Champtocé does not wish for mystery any more than you do, and that everything will be as clear as daylight, exactly as though the daughter of some Rue Saint-Denis citizen was about to be married."

"The social standing of the bride has nothing to do with the matter," muttered M. Franchard's obstinate predecessor.

M. de Champtocé, who had not, perhaps, thought the comparison altogether flattering, judged the moment a good one to keep his promise, and, accordingly, he began as follows: "The history of Jean de Monville's life is closely connected with my own, and that is one of the reasons why I have so long been obliged to remain silent regarding it. I had powerful motives for waiting before I resumed my own true name and title. But at present, those reasons have ceased to exist, and there is nothing to prevent me from telling you how I became acquainted with this young fellow, and why I am interested in him."

"At last," murmured M. Mornac.

"Not quite a year ago," resumed the marquis, "I again saw France after a very long absence. For more than thirty years I had been busy with large property I own in America and in the English colonies, but at last I decided to realize everything and to return and settle permanently in Paris. To tell the truth, I was not drawn here by the desire to hold the rank to which my birth and fortune entitled me. The gay life which Paris offers to rich strangers did not tempt me, and I should have preferred living quietly in India had I not had a mission to fulfil in Europe."

"A mission!" muttered M. Mornac; "ah, yes, true? Diplomats are often sent from one end of the world to the other."

"I was not a diplomatist," resumed the marquis; "and no prince of the Indian Ocean had confided even the most trifling embassy to me. No. My mission was quite private and confidential, but it was a double or rather triple one."

The ex-lawyer made a grimace which was as much as to say : "There we come to the mysteries again."

"I wished, in the first place," continued the marquis, "to pay an old debt contracted in my youth."

"That was a very worthy purpose."

"But difficult of execution, for my debt was not one of those which can be paid in money, and my creditors would have been glad to avoid being paid in the kind of coin which I had in reserve for them."

"More and more incomprehensible," growled M. Mornac.

"I succeeded, after long operations of which I will spare you the narrative, and last night I became free once more. You start; but it is quite true; only a few hours ago this account was settled in the little château which you can see over there in the park, an account which was opened in 1832, far away in Anjou." On hearing this even M. Franchard looked puzzled, for his client's allusions to the nocturnal adventures of the Brossin family were enigmas to him as to his predecessor. "But let us leave all that," continued the marquis. "I had to attend to much dearer interests. I had to fulfil sacred engagements, for I had vowed to find two children. I had sworn to give them back their name, their fortune, and—"

"Two children, did you say?" asked M. Mornac, unable to control his impatience.

"Yes. A young girl, in the first place, whom I need not name to you, for you have already guessed that I allude to Mademoiselle Andrée Salazie."

"I know that, or, at all events, you have already done me the honour to tell me that you knew her father, and that he would soon show himself, but, while waiting for this prediction to be realised, allow me to observe that it was to obtain information respecting Jack of the Cliffs, or Monville—as both are one—that I came here to-day."

"Thank you, sir, for reminding me of the aim of your visit. It will be time enough to return to Mademoiselle Andrée later on, and, besides, the end of my narrative will bring me to the facts which relate to her. I was saying that I had promised to find another child, but I had little hope of discovering his whereabouts, for all that I knew concerning him was his name—a name which I had learned under very singular circumstances."

"Not more strange, most likely, than all the rest of this," muttered M. Mornac, still incredulous.

"Perhaps not. You shall see. During one of my last voyages, while crossing the China seas, the brig which I commanded met a disabled ship about to sink. I had a boat lowered, and with some of my seamen I boarded the wreck, where a sad sight awaited us. The deck was stained with blood and strewn with dead bodies. Some Malay pirates, who are very numerous in those seas, had massacred the crew, pillaged the cargo, and the hold was half full of water. One man alone still breathed, and I saw from his attire that he had been the captain of the unlucky ship. I immediately had him removed to my brig, but he expired before reaching it, and in his death-throes he several times repeated a French name. I found this name written on some papers which the unfortunate man had sewn up in his clothes, and which, thanks to this precaution, had escaped the search of the pirates; however, they bore no indication which could help me in making a search. I think that I should have forgotten the matter, if, among these blood-stained documents, there had not been a draft on a London house for a very large sum of money. This draft was to the order

of the person bearing the name so often repeated by the dying man, and I thought that the poor fellow had realised all his possessions in order to pass them over to a son, or, at all events, some relative from whom he had long been parted. I did not witness without deep emotion this sorrowful end of a seaman, parting with life far away from his native land, and from all he loved on earth. I myself was suffering all the grief of exile and absence, and it seemed to me that there was a duty incumbent upon me."

"That of searching for the dead man's heir, no doubt," murmured the young notary.

"And you found him in the person of Jack of the Cliffs. This is a chance which may well be called miraculous," said M. Mornac, in a somewhat sceptical tone.

"Allow me to finish, sir," said the marquis, with a deal of dignity. "A long time elapsed before the miracle, as you call it, was performed. The inquiries I made in the ports of India yielded no useful result as regards the sunken ship, of which I did not even know the name, as its stern had been destroyed by the pirates. On my arrival in Europe I was not much more fortunate. The banking-house in London on which the draft was drawn expressed its willingness to pay the money to its true owner, for the funds had been deposited six months before with correspondents at Calcutta. By whom? The firm did not know and had not inquired. However, I decided to write to India, and while awaiting a reply I made other inquiries in France, for, as I just told you, the name was a French one. However, no one could give me any information likely to lead me to the person I wanted to find, and I acquired almost a certainty that the seaman massacred off Borneo had signed a false name, having, in all probability, some motive for hiding his real one. I had not yet received any news from Calcutta, and I thought of handing the State this fortune the owner of which could not be found, when an accident happened which you, Monsieur Mornac, have certainly not forgotten."

"I!" exclaimed the ex-notary, somewhat startled.

"It seems to me that you were staying at your farm in Normandy, while I was at the château of your neighbour, Baron Brossin. I even had the honour of meeting you one day, or rather one evening, on the plateau between the village of Biville and a little house in ruins near the Black Rock."

"The Black Rock! Ah, I have good reason to remember that night. My wife and our dear Andrée were nearly drowned by the high tide, and it was then and there that the poor girl's foolish passion took root. But—wait a moment—was it not on the night that followed our meeting that you disappeared from Monsieur Brossin's château?"

"It was."

"Your hat was found upon the beach amid a pool of blood. And Jack of the Cliffs was accused of having made away with you. I took his part; in fact, I defended him at first; but why did he run away from prison if his conscience was clear?"

"Do you think, sir," said M. de Champtocé, coldly, "that I should now be protecting a man who attempted to murder me?"

"No, no, of course not; not likely; but why did you vanish? what happened to you? I wanted to ask you all that when you were in the conservatory with me, but—"

"If you really wish to hear you must listen," interrupted the marquis,

"for the story which I am about to tell is closely connected with the event which you have just mentioned."

"There you go again ! I am beginning to feel quite confused once more. I was flattering myself, just now, that I had caught a glimpse of light which explained Jean's existence to some extent, but now we have leaped from the Island of Borneo to Monsieur Brossin's château. Pray, tell me, what happened in the baron's garden ?"

"A person attempted to murder me."

"Murder you ?" said M. Mornac ; "so what people conjectured was not without foundation ? But who was this person ?"

"His name has nothing to do with what I am now relating," replied M. de Champtocé.

"Well ! he only half killed you, as you are here again," replied the old notary, gaily ; "but I can't understand how you survived such a terrible fall. I know the cliff at the end of the Monville grounds. It is fifty feet high, and perpendicular, and with the sea below—"

"You were talking just now of miracles," resumed M. de Champtocé, who had not forgotten M. Mornac's incredulity. "Well, that night, Heaven wrought one."

"Heaven must have helped you, for, otherwise, you would have broken every bone in your body."

"Don't imagine that I escaped uninjured, for I had one shoulder dislocated, my skull fractured, and I remained for an hour unconscious."

"But how was it you fell over this precipice ?"

"I was pushed over by a scamp who assaulted me, while I stood with my back to him. He must have thought that he had killed me, for he fled without even looking to see if I was lying upon the beach. Had he been less cowardly he would have gone down to dispatch me, and would then have seen that my fall had twice been checked by projections in the cliff, and he then might have suspected that there was some life left in me."

"He came from the château then ?" said M. Mornac.

"Yes, he came from the château and even lived there."

"And you allow him to go unpunished ?"

"How do you know that he has not been punished ?"

"Well, I read the newspapers every morning, and I have never seen any mention of anything of the kind. It was said that 'the legal authorities were taking measures to find the culprit.' They must still be 'taking measures,' I should say."

"There are some punishments which the penal code knows nothing about," replied M. de Champtocé.

"Yes ! mental suffering, dishonour, but all that is only felt by lofty natures and good ones, and with rascals, I only believe in capital punishment."

"Well, I must now inform you that the crime had a witness," said M. de Champtocé.

"Could not that witness have prevented it ?" demanded the ex-notary.

"He, at least, prevented my death as you will see. At the moment when I was pushed off the cliff, he was standing on the platform of the keep of the old castle of Monville which stands at the end of Monsieur Brossin's grounds."

"Yes, yes, I know where it is ! I even remember—but, here I have interrupted you again. Excuse me, pray continue." The worthy old fellow was beginning to see that the veil was gradually being raised from



the mystery, and his attention was so much awakened that he now almost forgot the purpose of his visit.

"The person who had seen everything," resumed M. de Champtocé, "ran a great risk himself, for the murderer having found out that he had witnessed the crime, pursued him to kill him also. However, this brave witness succeeded in escaping him by a miracle of skill and courage, and as soon as he had done so he came to the beach. The tide was coming in, the waves had already reached my inanimate body when my rescuer took me up in his arms and carried me to a boat moored close to the rocks. When I recovered consciousness I lay on a bed of dry-seaweed. A young fellow, almost a lad, was kneeling beside me, bathing my wounds. The place where I found myself was a vaulted hall which a roughly made lamp dimly lighted, and which looked like a cellar in some old castle. My guardian had set my dislocated shoulder with singular skill, and had bound it up as well as an old and experienced surgeon could have done; indeed, all my wounds had been dressed, but I had felt no pain. No woman could have acted more gently. Fever and delirium, however, now set in. The shock to my brain had been severe. My rescuer told me, when I was well enough to talk, that he knew my name, and that of the scoundrel who had tried to kill me, and that he had seen me talking to a young girl on the plateau of Biville, and that he loved me 'because I loved her.' He assured me that I was safe where I was, and that there were only two entrances to the place known to him alone. One he said was by the beach, and the other by some steps cut in the rock, leading to what seemed a closed wall. He showed me how to open it, however, by means of an iron ring at the foot of my bed. He then left me, 'for a short time,' he said, and I fell into a state of stupor. Delirium must have returned, and then intervals of consciousness. During one of these intervals I heard three knocks on the wall, which was the signal by which this young fellow had told me that he would announce his return. But I had not sufficient strength to hold out my hand and pull the iron ring. I was only able to call out, and my wild appeal was perhaps heard—"

"It was!" exclaimed M. Mornac. "Andrée and I heard it. It was she who knocked. I understand everything now. You were in the ruins near the Black Rock."

"And I should have died there, if the courageous young fellow who had brought me there had not braved a thousand dangers to return to me. He managed to make his escape from the prison at Dieppe, where he had been sent, for he was accused of having murdered me."

"I knew that I had guessed his name!" interrupted M. Mornac. "It was, indeed, Jack of the Cliffs."

"So he was called in the district, where his ancestors had formerly been powerful, for Jean was the last descendant of the barons of Monville."

"I know that he declares so."

"His title is perfectly clear. I have seen and examined all his family papers," said the marquis, smiling; "but this wasn't all, the name of Monville was a revelation to me."

"The sea-captain, then—" began M. Mornac.

"The sea-captain," interrupted the marquis, "whom the Borneo pirates had killed was Jean's uncle, and the draft belonged to Jean for whom I had been vainly searching since my return to France. He had saved my life, and I brought him a fortune. You see that Heaven orders all things well."

"If any one else told me all this—" began M. Mornac once more.

"You would not believe it, and you would, perhaps, be right; but Jean is able to prove his rank and his rights, even before a magistrate. Just question Monsicur Franchard on the point."

"I have seldom seen such well-authenticated titles," said the young notary.

"But how is it," asked M. Mornac, "that Jean led this vagabond life, when he knew that his uncle was on the seas trying to accumulate a fortune? how could he waste his youth in poaching or being a smuggler, so it was said?"

"It was slander, as Jean can prove to you; and I now hope that you won't hold out against him," said the marquis.

"I yield," replied M. Mornac gaily, "and I even believe that my wife won't oppose the match any longer when she knows all that you have told me."

"I should ask your permission to introduce Jean to you to-day if he were well, but I am sorry to say he is not."

"There is but one thing that disturbs me," rejoined M. Mornac, scratching his ear, as he always did when perplexed. "I know Andrée's pride. She was willing to marry Jean when she thought him poor, although we opposed it; but, how do I know if she won't refuse him when he proves to be so rich."

"She will be richer than he," said the marquis.

"Through her father?—but when will he return to her? Ah! if my poor friend Mathis hadn't forgotten to sign his will? If, instead of that unlucky copy, we had the original, Andrée's lot would be a happy one. My poor friend wrote his last wishes in my private room, and almost under my dictation, for he knew little about legal formalities, and he came to consult me about drawing up his will. He made a rough copy which he afterwards transcribed upon another sheet of paper duly signed and dated. But in the sealed envelope he gave to me there was only the unsigned rough copy, which was of course valueless."

"I was aware of all that, for I saw Andrée and Madame de Mathis at Chevreuse on the very day when you came to read the will."

"My wife told you then, and you no doubt heard that the valid copy must have been thrown into my waste paper basket. I'm afraid it will never be found—for my valet always sold all the waste paper to a grocer in the neighbourhood."

"But are you certain that Monsieur de Mathis did not take the valid copy away with him?"

"It is possible that he did so; but, if he did, why didn't he tell me that he had discovered the mistake he had made?"

"Well, what often appears most improbable may still be true, for Heaven mocks at human plans, and the hand of Providence has been visible in all I have had to tell you."

"Do you mean to assert that the real will still exists? That wouldn't of course be stranger than the story of Jack of the Cliffs; but, in truth—"

"Listen to me, sir," said the marquis, gravely, "and when you have heard everything, you will doubt no longer." M. de Mornac did not need urging to listen attentively, and M. Franchard did not disguise his lively curiosity. "I told you a moment ago," resumed M. de Champtocé, "that I returned to France less than a year ago. In point of fact it was on the 20th September, and on the morrow I arrived at the château of Chevreuse, early in the morning."

"What ! at Mathis's house ?"

"Yes ; he was the only man who knew my past life and my true name. I had not seen him for many years, but I was sure of finding him as true and devoted as in past times. You never heard him speak of me. I know that, and it does not surprise me. But I had known the Mathis family at Mauritius, at the time of Andrée's birth, and reasons which concerned her future compelled Mathis to refrain from speaking to her of me."

"Excuse me, but how was it that we never met at the château ?" asked M. Mornae.

"You were in Switzerland when I went there for the first time on the morning of the 21st of September," replied M. de Champtocé.

"And my poor friend died the next night ! Ah ! I now understand your presence beside those who were dying, and your devotion and grief. It was thought that you were some foreign physician. I remember now that no one could tell me how you had come there."

"No one saw me go in. I had sent a message to Monsieur de Mathis, and he let me in by a little gate, which communicated with the wood in the rear, and led me to his private room, which was very retired. I spent all that day—the last of his life—in that room."

"But the house was full of company ; there was an entertainment."

"Yes, to celebrate Andrée's betrothal. Monsieur de Mathis told me that. Motives of which he perfectly understood the importance, prevented me from showing myself to his guests, and besides, after so long an absence, we had many confidential matters to talk over. The mission with which I had been charged by his ward's father was the principal subject of our conversation, and it was agreed that I should wait a few days before being introduced to the family."

"Wasn't our old friend, Madame de Mathis, aware that you were there ?"

"She came to see me several times, at intervals, while Monsieur de Mathis was with his guests, whom he could not completely desert."

"She knows you then ?"

"Ask Andrée if her godmother, who sat mute and motionless when we had an interview in her presence, looked upon me as a stranger ? This was after the unfortunate lady had become a paralytic. But you will see whether she will recognise me or not when I kneel at her feet, and you will not doubt—"

"Your sincerity ? your affection for Andrée ? I don't need such proofs. Good hearts understand each other, and I don't suspect your intentions. My doubts are purely and simply those of a man of the law."

"I can set them at rest."

"Tell me how it was, then, that Mathis was able to arrange his ward's marriage with Monsieur de Kergas ? If Andrée's father were living, his consent was necessary, and yet, I know that the mayor intended to furnish two certificates of death."

"I beg your pardon, one only—that of Andrée's mother. Her father's death was never proved, only there was a document by which he was reported to be dead, having been shipwrecked off the Madagascar coast."

"I faintly remember hearing Mathis say something of the kind," said the notary, in a low tone, and then he added aloud : "All this is very likely, but let us return to the will. Didn't you say just now that—"

"It exists ? Well, let me finish convincing you that it does. During our long conversation Andrée's guardian talked over the dear girl's in-

terests with me. Her father had made a large fortune, and she no longer needed any one's benefactions; however, Monsieur de Mathis was not aware of all this until I told him of it. He had previously arranged for her future and he naturally confided to me what he had done for her. He said a great deal to me about his nephew, Monsieur Jules Noridet, whose behaviour had given him reason for complaint at various times, and he added, 'My will is made, and for additional safety I have placed it in the hands of my most intimate friend, Monsieur Mornac, who is at the present time in Switzerland; however, I have kept a rough copy of it, and will show it to you.'"

"Did he do so?" cried the old notary, in utter amazement.

"Yes, he took it out of a drawer, and explained to me that he was glad he had it in his possession, as he had at first thrown it among the waste paper in your office."

"Then Heaven must have inspired him with the thought of going back to my private room in search of it," muttered M. Mornac, whose surprise was gradually becoming delight.

"No doubt; the paper still retained signs of having been crumpled up," continued M. de Champtocé, "and I had to smooth it carefully before I could read it; when I did so I was startled to find that it was regularly signed, and I said so to Mathis. Surprised at first, he soon guessed how this had happened, and began to blame his own carelessness. I reminded him, however, that you would soon return home, and that it would be easy to change the original for the copy. Mathis admitted that I was right, but he was so vexed with himself, that he forced me to take the will and put it into my note case. I can still hear him saying: 'Pray keep it for me, my friend; I might lose it again, and I might not be alive to repair the loss.' This was the last thing on his mind, and that fatal night when he was dying amid atrocious sufferings, when his voice failed him I could still see him make signs which I alone understood, and I read in his almost sightless eyes this last prayer: 'Save my wife's fortune, save Andrée's money!'"

The worthy ex-notary was now shedding tears, and his young successor was more affected than he cared to appear. "Here," added the Marquis de Champtocé, drawing a paper from a morocco note-case, "here is the will."

M. Mornac vented his astonishment in muttered ejaculations and extravagant gestures. Even M. Franchard, although he had less personal interest in the recovery of this will, was so startled that he turned and twisted till his white tie was awry. "See whether it is regular," said the marquis, holding out the document.

"That's it!" said Mornac, "it is signed and dated! We need only produce it! But how enraged Monsieur Jules Noridet will be!"

"I intended calling on you to-day to take you this will," said M. de Champtocé, addressing M. Franchard. "I wished at the same time to ask you what formalities were necessary."

"Very few. It will suffice to deposit this document in the hands of the chief judge of the civil court, and—"

"One moment, my dear colleague," said M. Mornac, "it is always best to be prepared for any emergency, in other words, it is as well we should take our precautions in case Monsieur Noridet should begin a lawsuit against us."

"He would only lose it. What could he assert against his uncle's signature?"

"How do I know? He may dispute its authenticity."

"Experts would be brought forward who would at once recognise the signature as being that of Monsieur de Mathis."

"You are young yet, my dear Franchard! If you had practised law as I have for thirty years you would know that 'experts' only make matters worse. I have seen three writing-masters sustain three different opinions as to a document's authenticity."

"But we sha'n't have anything of the kind here," said the young notary, somewhat piqued by his predecessor's dictatorial tone. "It is well known that Monsieur de Mathis's will was lost; the strange story was circulated all over Paris. So no one will be surprised that it has been found again, Monsieur Noridet least of all."

"You don't know him, my dear friend. He may not be surprised; but he will certainly pretend to be so, and won't hesitate at defending his rights. Remember that this will mean complete ruin for him."

"He will still have his personal fortune. Monsieur Noridet has been my client ever since last winter, and I remember that he had a large capital to dispose of."

"Yes, what he seized upon after the death of my poor friend Mathis, for he long ago squandered what his father left him."

"You greatly surprise me. I thought that Monsieur Noridet—"

"Jules is a dissipated man, and he has a bad heart; he showed himself in his true light when his poor aunt was deprived of everything. There was not the slightest sign of a good impulse or of any feeling whatever on his part, not even any expression of regret. I tell you that he is capable of anything."

M. Franchard, beaten by these arguments, made no further attempt to defend his client's morality. M. de Champtocé had listened to the two lawyers without a word, but he now interfered in view of tranquillizing M. Mornac. "I am sure that Monsieur Noridet won't attempt to go to law about the will," he said.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes. He was paying a visit at the château of Mouville when I was there last year."

"True! I had forgotten that," said M. Mornac.

"I talked for a long time with him on the day before my—my fall from the cliff."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Yes, I saw him in Switzerland on the night following upon the accident which so nearly cost Mademoiselle Andrée her life."

"Yes; he was there at the time, for I met him myself in the street at Schaffhausen, and I have never been able to understand what he came there for."

"Really," said M. Franchard, desirous of putting in a word, "it seems as though Monsieur Jules Noridet had the evil eye. He must be a *jettatore*, as they say in Naples."

"The fact is," said M. Mornac, "that his presence almost always brings misfortune. The two last visits which he paid to Chevreuse prove that. One was at the time of his uncle's death, when his aunt became paralytic, and when poor Monsieur de Kergas died from eating those fatal mushrooms; and the other on the day when the unsigned will left Andrée and her god-mother penniless."

"It is perhaps on account of all these sad events that Monsieur Noridet

won't care to increase his reputation as a bird of ill-omen by starting a lawsuit," said M. de Champtocé, quietly.

"I begin to hope that he will let us alone," replied M. Mornac; "but don't you think that it would be better to allow me to produce this will? It can be supposed I have found it again among my old papers, and we shall thus avoid all the romantic particulars of its recovery, which lawyers might fail to see in their true light."

"You are right, a thousand times right, and it is useless to reveal all this, at all events until Andrée is married."

"By the way, the will does not give Andrée anything like the fortune that Monsieur de Monville will have. You say that he has—"

"Three millions."

"Andrée will be a female Job in comparison to that!"

"How's that," said M. Franchard, "if Mademoiselle Salazie inherits the greater part of the property left by Monsieur de Mathis—"

"She doesn't. He left the bulk of his fortune to his wife, and only five hundred thousand francs to Andrée," said the marquis.

"Ah! what do you say to that, Franchard?" asked M. Mornac.

"I say that a young girl who brings her husband a dowry representing an income of twenty-five thousand francs, and who is beautiful and graceful, and intelligent besides, isn't a bad match, by any means. Besides, everything will probably revert to her at her godmother's death."

"How could that be? Our poor friend, Madame de Mathis, is completely paralyzed. She can neither read nor write, and there is but a small chance that she will ever recover. So, if this state of health continues, her property will revert to distant relations, or perhaps to the State."

"You forget," said M. de Champtocé, "that Andrée's fortune includes the bond which I gave her last year from her father, and that he is very rich."

"You may think me a perfect old fogey," rejoined M. Mornac, "but I confess that I shall persist in advising Andrée to leave the deed in her desk until I am satisfied as to the source this money is derived from."

"You mean until her father appears?"

"I do," replied the old lawyer. "And the sooner he arrives the better. Andrée's health is suffering from too great a strain on the nerves. And, besides, even when he returns, that won't be everything. He must prove his identity and relationship, give his consent to this marriage—"

"Oh! you may be sure of that beforehand," said the marquis.

"Well, I hope so; only I don't see how we can proceed until Monsieur Salazie turns up—"

"Monsieur Salazie?"

"Yes, Andrée's father. That is his name, isn't it?"

"Her mother's name, you mean?"

"What! her mother's name. Why, then—"

"You have understood me, sir. I know that you gentlemen are both men of honour, and now I can reveal the truth to you. Legally speaking, Andrée has no father."

"Ah! good Heavens! The poor child has no idea of her situation. This, then, is why the Mathis's were so discreet when speaking of their ward's family. The document setting forth her father's reputed demise was only a blind—"

"In God's eye," said M. de Champtocé, slowly, "Jeanne Salazie was guiltless, for if she did not conform to all the requirements of French law,

she had at least been married by a priest, and if the man with whom she plighted her troth did not perfect the union, it was because he wished to give his daughter rank and fortune at the same time as a name. God cruelly punished him for having thus given way to a false feeling of vanity and ambition, for fortune and rank came too late for him to repair his error. Jeanne Salazie died before she again saw the man she loved, but also without suspecting that a blot would rest upon her child; for amid the semi-savage life she led near the Bay of the Falls, she was ignorant of the regulations invented in civilized countries, and believed herself to be the lawful wife of the man she loved."

The ex-notary shook his head with the air of a man who is barely satisfied; indeed it was evident that he did not approve of the course taken by Andrée's father. "Well," said he, after a pause, "Jeanne Salazie's lover might at least have acknowledged his child—"

"Don't reproach him," rejoined the marquis; "he was then so miserable, so far away, so impeded as regards his freedom, that he was unable to perform his duty; but he is now willing to repair everything, and I swear to you, he will do so."

"Hum!" said M. Mornac, quietly, "I am afraid that would be another mistake!"

M. de Champtocé started with surprise.

"Yes," resumed M. Mornac, "you may not be aware of it, but it is my duty to inform you that our dear Andrée, not having been born in lawful wedlock—for the marriage by a priest is valueless in the eyes of the French law—that such being the case she has a certain interest in not being formally acknowledged as her father's daughter. Her father is rich, is he not?"

"Very rich," said M. de Champtocé, who was quite amazed by M. Mornac's language.

"Well, then, he must not acknowledge her, for if he did so he could not leave her all his fortune. By the terms of the law, no man can make his illegitimate child his sole heir or heiress—though, on the other hand, he might freely leave every farthing he possesses to a stranger, providing, of course, that he has no legitimate offspring. Such is the law, and you, no doubt, remember the Latin axiom—*Dura lex*—"

"*Sed lex*," added M. Franchard, who was desirous of putting in a word.

"And besides," added M. Mornac, "unfortunate as Andrée's position may be, it greatly simplifies the necessary matrimonial formalities. With her certificate of birth and her mother's certificate of death, she can dispense with waiting for her father's arrival; for, legally speaking, he has nothing whatever to do with her—"

"Yes," said the marquis, "Andrée can marry Jean de Monville without delay. In any case, her father will be there to give her his blessing, for he is named Albert—"

"Like you, sir," said M. Franchard, bowing.

"I have certainly heard Andrée use that name in her prayers," interrupted M. Mornac; "but it is only a Christian name—"

"Wait," rejoined the marquis. "Andrée's father is named Albert de Champtocé, and I thank you for having compelled me to reveal what tic unites me to your dear ward."

## XXXII.

A WEEK had elapsed since the events at M. de Champtocé's residence ; it was eleven o'clock in the evening, the reception rooms of the Gnat Club were ablaze with light, and the loungers on the boulevard could admire the easy style in which the members of this elegant gathering smoked their cigars on the balcony. The cool evening air had there drawn together some curious specimens of Parisian fast society. Two or three corpulent men of middle-age were digesting their dinner in their rocking-chairs, near an old beau who still wore his hat tilted on one side, as in the far-off days of his youth, when the Liberals went to the Café de Valois to quarrel with the body-guards ; half a dozen youths with high collars, and their hair carefully parted down the middle, were also collected together, while, for the benefit of the public in the street, the scene was completed by a graceful and picturesque view of boot soles, furnished by gentlemen who believed in following the habits of free America.

It was the time of night when, after an intensely hot summer's day, the public conc to inhale a little dust under the plane-trees, and when privileged men about town, after an excursion to Mabilly, meet at their club to talk over their conquests. It would be idle to assert that the tableau afforded was superior to that of the Bay of Naples or the Bosphorus, but it had a certain picturesque appearance which is not to be met with elsewhere in either hemisphere. Vehicles were rolling along in a triple file, casting innumerable moving, starry lights amid the gloom. On both sides of the boulevard the yellow glow of the kiosks, where newspapers are sold, recalled a Chinese "Feast of Lanterns," while the cafés flaring with gaslight displayed groups of women in gairish attire.

The moon looked down upon this "Witches' Sabbath" from amid the clear June sky and modestly gleamed upon the windows of the garrets, as though it scorned to struggle with all the hydrogenous illumination. It might have gone out entirely without any one, from the Madeleine to the Faubourg Montmartre, discovering that its silvery light had vanished.

Curious though it was, the sight below remained unnoticed by the elegant group upon the balcony, where, in point of fact, a very grave and all absorbing question was being discussed—in a word, the comparative merits of French and English coachmen. There was a bout on the subject between the old beau and the young dandies, and finally M. Théodore Vergoncey, who was present, began sounding the praises of a chestnut "hack" which he "meant" to buy. However, he did not get very far, being most unceremoniously interrupted by a stout gentleman who was rocking in an American chair. "Vergoncey, my friend," said this mandarin, who wore a white waistcoat and a spotted tie, "you have the finest stable in the Gâtinais, that's granted ; but I assure you that I do not care a straw whether you have or not. I should greatly prefer to hear what truth there is in the stories about your friends of the Boulevard Haussmann."

Handsome Théodore remained with his mouth open, and began to stroke his silky whiskers in an absent-minded manner. The subject was particularly distasteful to him, and, moreover, he hated the person who had spoken, besides being mortally afraid of him. In reality the person and the wit of M. Kornemann, one of the founders of the Gnat Club, were not of a pleasing character. A confirmed old bachelor, with forty thousand francs



a-year, and a portly figure, this vicious and egotistical capitalist was naturally spiteful and sharply witty. He had a talent for seasoning his remarks with unpleasant jokes, and as he went a great deal into Parisian society, and was always on the lookout for scandal, his indiscretion and his attacks were very generally feared. The handsome Vergoncey was one of his favourite butts, and as he was indebted to him for the loan of a hundred louis, lent without security, he was perforce constrained to put up with his impertinence. "Come now, Théodore," continued M. Kornemann, the pitiless forty-year older, "don't be mysterious! The baron's ruin is everybody's secret. Is it not, Forceval?" said he, turning to the old beau.

"It was proclaimed at the Jockey Club yesterday," said M. de Forceval, who was a member of the most fashionable gatherings, and who only called at the Gnat's place to hear Kornemann's gossip and spiteful remarks.

"I think that there is a good deal of exaggeration in it all," replied Vergoncey, timidly. "Monsieur Brossin may have been embarrassed for a time, but his credit hasn't suffered. He had some trouble in paying up at the end of the month, and that is all."

"End of the month! it is the end of the Brossins, past, present, and future. As for Alfred, your young friend, he would not find a farthing on *his* signature."

"But I assure you, my dear Kornemann, that matters are not so bad as all that. Monsieur Brossin has a house in Paris, a château and land in Normandy, and—"

"They are all for sale, my good fellow, all for sale! If you remain faithful to misfortune, you will have to leave the country with those people, and I am sure you will, Vergoncey, quite sure of it! You will imitate the noble conduct of General Bertrand in following Napoleon to Saint Helena, although, to tell the truth, that old baroness isn't much like the conqueror of the world.

The unfortunate Théodore, who could not find a word to oppose to all this, began shifting from one foot to the other; but his sufferings were not at an end by any means, for Kornemann, after enjoying his embarrassment for a time, again resumed. "My dear friend, what I say is purely on account of the interest I take in that delightful family. What an adorable creature Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin is! I never, on my word of honour, saw any one walk so beautifully on Louis Quinze heels. And to think that she will have to wear common shoes, when she becomes Madame Noridet! It is simply heartrending!"

"Ah, is it true that she is going to marry him?" asked M. de Forceval.

"You know that he is ruined, that millionaire of a Jules?"

"He deserves to be. He put on too many airs."

"But what a strange idea of theirs, to get married, when neither of them has a copper left."

These varied exclamations came at one and the same moment from either end of the balcony.

"Gentlemen," said Kornemann, gravely, settling in his seat with a magisterial air, "Noridet is a sharp fellow, and you may be sure that he knows what he is about. That is what makes me share our friend Vergoncey's opinion—the baron must have one or two millions hidden away in some old stocking; now, no doubt, Noridet has found that out."

"Perhaps!" said M. de Forceval, "but that old fox of a Brossin is as sharp as his future son-in-law, and if he were still rich he would not let Jules have his daughter."

"Bah ! perhaps he isn't sorry to get rid of his fair offspring, and besides, a man like Noridet always falls on his feet. I should not be surprised to see him as dashing as ever in a year or two."

"He has not shown himself here for an age," said one young fop with a high collar.

"Perhaps not, my dear sir," said Kornemann ; "but people don't get over it so soon, when a will, that deprives them of three millions, turns up. That will never happen to you, Charlemont."

The fop abstained from replying, for he was an economical man of fashion, and managed to make both ends meet on an allowance of five hundred francs a month, so he hardly cared to hear millions mentioned ; they made his mouth water.

"As to marrying," now said Forceval, "have you heard the greatest news of the day ?"

"I have heard of three different marriages that are afoot," said Kornemann, who always endeavoured to appear well posted.

"Well, I allude to Monsieur de Monville, who is going to marry Mademoiselle de Champtocé. It is to take place next month, and everybody is talking about it."

"I should think so, indeed ! Two old families reviving again, and a little schoolgirl, who used to be mending her stockings at the house of an old notary's wife, by whom she was adopted out of charity, waking up one fine morning and finding herself the heiress of a marquis, with an income of six hundred thousand francs ! It is really enough to startle anybody !"

"Don't laugh, my dear fellow ! All this is very serious, for the Champ-tocés belong to the old nobility of Anjou, and the Monvilles date from the Crusades," said the old beau, who himself belonged to a good family. "The father-in-law and the son-in-law were admitted yesterday to one of our best clubs by acclamation. Not a single black ball, and you know that seldom happens."

"Well ! I shall have the pleasure of treating them to one, for they will be candidates here to-morrow."

"Why should you do that, pray ?"

"Because I hate people whom I don't know."

And especially if they are better than you are," muttered Forceval.

"Ah ! Vergonecy," suddenly said Kornemann, "who is that old fellow standing over there on the pavement, and staring about him ? Isn't he the baron's cashier ?"

"Who ? that old fellow with a broad-brimmed hat ?" said Théodore, leaning over the railing.

"No, not that one. That is some native of Brittany. I mean the fellow near the gas-lamp, leaning on a cane."

"Yes, I really believe it is he," said Vergonecy, much puzzled by the persistence with which M. Bouscareau was staring at the club windows. "What the deuce does he want here ?"

"Bah ! Brossin has perhaps sent him to look for his Alfred, or else for the triumphant Noridet, the future spouse of the adorable Henriette. It's he at all events ! I know him well. I have often seen his ugly phiz when I called to get my dividends, at the time when the baron still paid up. If he has really come after his employer's son-in-law, he will have a nice reception ; for Jules must now be lamenting like Jeremiah over his vanished millions."

"Good evening, gentlemen !" said a new comer at this very moment.

The speaker turned and found himself face to face with Noridet, whose sudden apparition produced a very decided effect. Silence prevailed, every one looked at his neighbour, and some members were seized with a violent fit of coughing, which was intended to hide their embarrassment.

Noridet was not liked by any of them, but they all feared him, for he was the kind of man to take up any ill-timed jest, and force the person who indulged in it to rise betimes and take a turn at Vincennes. He passed for a good shot in the pistol-galleries, and an equally good one on the duelling-ground, and the bravest avoided quarrelling with him. Kornemann, who was no fighter, felt particularly ill at ease, for Noridet might have heard what he had just said. The everlasting railer, fearing a demand for an explanation, tried to keep countenance by humming an air from "*La Belle Hélène*." The other members laughed in their sleeves at his embarrassment, and Vergoncey was not quite easy in his own mind, for M. Brossin's future son-in-law had never liked him in the least. However, M. de Forceval retained the traditions of old times, and besides, he was not afraid of any one, either with sword or pistol. He bowed to Noridet with a dignified familiarity which reminded one of court manners in the days of Charles X., and resumed his dissertation on English and French coachmen without the slightest hesitation.

"What were you talking of, gentlemen?" now said Jules, in a mild tone.

As a rule, whenever Noridet spoke in a pleasant way, it was a sure sign that he meant to pick an ugly quarrel with some one or other. Kornemann had detected this little peculiarity long before, and recognising the symptom, he thought that he was about to have an unpleasant time of it; however, he did as some cowards do, who rush upon the enemy in order not to hear the balls whistling about their ears. In fact, he took it upon himself to reply: "To tell the truth, my dear friend," said he in an easy tone, which the flush on his face belied, "we were talking of you."

"Indeed, and on what subject?" asked Noridet, still mildly and pleasantly.

"We were complaining that you never come here now? You are scarcer than louis in our friend Charlemont's pocket—"

The ghastly fop who bore this pretty name again began shifting from one foot to the other.

"More invisible than the farms and castles in the Gâtinais which belong to our friend Vergoncey—"

"Allow me, allow me," interrupted the handsome Théodore, "I never said that I had a castle."

"More difficult to find than— Bah! I cannot think of any other comparison; but in a word, my dear sir, you have been dropping your friends here, and that is very bad. The club needs you, the club sighs after its prince of whist, its king of baccarat; and more than one noble lord has called here to ask why you had so completely disappeared."

By throwing this stone into M. de Forceval's garden, Kornemann charitably hoped to prevent the storm from bursting upon his own head, but he soon saw that there was no storm whatever except in his own imagination. "In a word," added he, in order to wind up with a grand flourish, "we were all longing to shout in chorus, as it were: 'Long live Noridet! Long live Noridet!'"

The effect was a failure, for no one but Vergoncey undertook to echo the huzza; however, instead of being angry at all this flow of words, Jules laughed heartily, and said with truly angelic sweetness: "You are all of

you very kind to regret my absence so much, but I have in the first place been absent from Paris for some days, and since my return I have not had an evening to myself. This surprises you, perhaps, but it is true ; I have to pass my time in choosing cashmere shawls and diamond earrings. That is a very absorbing occupation, and you will know how agreeable it is, my lads, some of these days when you all get married."

"Thank you, I am in no hurry," said one member.

"We have no time for marriage, my dear fellow," added another.

"Is that indeed the case?" exclaimed Kornemann, who had now recovered all his self-possession.

"It is, it is!" replied Noridet, gaily, "and I have not even a month of freedom left me, for I become a prisoner on the first of July."

"Your bride is Mademoiselle Henriette Brossin, eh?"

"Her very self, my lord," said the betrothed, with comic emphasis.

"Well, then, my dear fellow, your conduct is grand ! it is really beautiful ! it is chivalrous."

"Really, gentlemen, I did not know that I deserved the flattering epithets which Kornemann bestows upon me, for I am simply going to marry a charming girl with a handsome dowry."

"The deuce you are ! where does the dowry come from ? Why, people say that Baron Brossin, your future papa-in-law, applied to go into liquidation a couple of days ago."

"That is true, but Mademoiselle Brossin has an independent fortune through her mother, and her father's financial troubles cannot affect that."

This unexpected statement caused a sensation. Some members did not believe it, and smiled slyly ; others mentally regretted not having known the fact before, and having lost the chance of marrying Henriette despite her father's failure.

"Ah, so much the better," now said Kornemann, looking as though he believed it all. "How kind and thoughtful it was of the baron, in the midst of his business cares, to put his daughter's dowry safe away. There are narrow-minded people who may pretend that he had no right to draw on his funds and set his children up at the expense of his creditors. But I look upon things from a higher point of view, and I maintain that he was right. Charity begins at home, now, doesn't it?"

The irony of all this chatter did not appear to wound Noridet in the least. He, who was usually so touchy, listened with exemplary patience while the family with which he was about to connect himself was thus discussed in phrases of double meaning.

"Oh !" said he, modestly, "you no doubt imagine that Mademoiselle Brossin is very rich. She has merely fifty thousand francs' income, no more, and no expectations in the future. You see that it is purely and simply a love-match."

"What ! what !" laughed Kornemann sneeringly, "I know a good many bachelors who would very much like love with fifty thousand francs' income. Ask Vergoney."

The handsome Théodore blushed once more to his very ears, for he had sometimes thought of aspiring to Henriette's hand, although the young heiress had always treated him with the utmost contempt. He was, besides, greatly surprised at the news which Noridet had just told. He had never heard the baroness say anything of the kind, and he believed the Brossins to be utterly ruined.

"Besides," said Noridet, quietly, "I have the more merit in contenting myself with so little as I have just lost the greater part of my own fortune and need a few millions to take the place of those that have flown away. However, my bride suits me and I do not regret anything."

"Now I call that true philosophy!" exclaimed the fat man; "I always said that you were a perfect Roman, a man of iron, so to speak."

"Bah! you must not praise me too much," said the future husband with well-calculated negligence. "I have still a few remnants of my fortune left, my personal fortune, I mean, representing about the same income as Mademoiselle Brossin will have, so that we can make up about a hundred thousand a year between us to begin housekeeping. It isn't much, but it is enough to live on."

"And very well, too," said Kornemann. "I admire the chance which brought about the baron's ruin at the same time as yours and settled everything by marrying you to a charming young girl."

"What a strange story it is about that will which turned up again! Everybody was talking about it yesterday at my club," now remarked M. de Forceval, turning to Noridet.

"Are you completely disinherited by your uncle in that pestiferous paper?" asked the inquisitive Kornemann.

"He leaves everything to his widow," said Noridet; "but recommends her to remember me, and as my poor aunt is very fond of me, I suppose that in the end she will leave me something."

"Oh, then; it isn't so bad, you will some day inherit her property," said M. de Forceval.

"I thought that Madame de Mathis was paralyzed, and consequently out of condition to make a will," remarked Kornemann, with his usual good feeling.

"My uncle has made but one special legacy," said Noridet, without answering this last observation. "He leaves a certain amount to a ward of his."

"Ah! yes, Mademoiselle Andrée de Champtocé!" cried the old beau; "that is still another romance, as it were, and the conclusion of it is very pleasant for a poor young girl, who was an orphan, too. Everybody was talking about it—"

"Yesterday at your club," said Kornemann, by way of finishing what the other had begun.

M. de Forceval looked askance at the interrupter, but lacked the time to get angry.

"Do you know the Champtocé family?" asked Noridet with an air of interest, which, this time, was unfeigned.

"Just as I know all the great names in France. I have never seen the present marquis, but my grandfather was an intimate friend of his grandfather's during the emigration."

"By the bye, Noridet," said Kornemann, "you know that the marquis is going to put up here, as well as that Monsicur de Monville, who is going to marry his daughter, and that we have to vote for them to-morrow. You will be here, won't you?"

"I shall try, although my time is hardly my own at present," replied Noridet, absently.

He had gone to the club that evening solely to acquaint the Gnats with his new situation once for all. He knew that this agreeable club was full of gossips, and that the information he might let fall would be eagerly

talked of all over Paris. So he took pains to mingle falsehood with truth, with sufficient skill to make those present believe in his disinterestedness as regards his marriage, and in the stability of the fortune remaining to him. This was of great importance to his plans, and his aim being effected he now only thought of going off. The occasion offered itself, for a footman now approached and said to him in a low tone: "A gentleman is waiting for you in the reception-room, sir."

"Very well. Tell him to wait," replied Noridet. "I have a letter to write, but I will come in a moment."

"I think that it is Monsieur Bouscareau who has come to see you," said Kornemann, with some degree of malice.

"Who may Monsieur Bouscareau be?"

Noridet knew very well whom the fat man was speaking about, but he preferred to deny all knowledge of such a vulgar individual.

"He is your future father-in-law's cashier, my dear sir. We saw him look up here just now, and when a cashier makes his appearance it is a good sign."

"Not when the cashier no longer has any cash-box," said Noridet, laughing; "but you must be mistaken, as I have no acquaintance whatever with that gentleman."

"No, no; I recognised his broad-brimmed hat, his snuff-coloured overcoat, and his portly figure."

"Well, I will go and see whether your eyes are good. Good night, gentlemen." And Noridet then turned his back to the group on the balcony, and strode away. Had anyone observed him now as he crossed the smoking-room of the club, he would have been startled by the almost frightful change which suddenly took place in his countenance. Never did an exhausted actor repairing to the slips after playing an exacting part, never did a prince weary of smiling upon his courtiers, show a more dejected visage and duller eyes than Jules Noridet, as he found himself alone after his conversation with his former boon companions. The mask of self-satisfied indifference, which he had had the courage to assume for half-an-hour, that mask of audacity fell from his face, and gave way to a look of savage despair.

This was because within the past week he had seen all the threats and promises of M. de Champtocé realised one after another. Warned by his notary, Franchard, of the production of the will signed by M. de Mathis, and informed by a letter from the marquis that the income of fifty thousand francs a year would be duly paid to Mademoiselle Brossin as soon as she became Madame Noridet, the scamp had realised that submission was all that now remained to him; not sincere submission, perhaps, but apparent submission at all events.

He felt that the least attempt at revolt would bring about a still more terrible punishment than the loss of the millions for the sake of which he had committed his first crime; he was, therefore, forced to obey. And yet he thirsted for revenge. The formal proposal for Henriette's hand had been made three days after the scene when Brossin and Bouscareau had been brought before the marquis. The baroness had seen fit to shed tears of joy. Then all the other events announced by M. de Champtocé had followed one after another. Rumours of Jean de Monville's immense fortune and of his marriage with Andrée Salazie, now Mademoiselle de Champtocé, had been noised about Paris, almost at the same time as the rumours of M. Brossin's failure. So all was over, irrevocably over, for the two marriages were now

but a question of time. That of Jean and Andrée would take place in a few weeks, and that of Noridet and Henriette a little later on. The hope of even a distant revenge was very slight, for what Noridet when rich and respected had not been able to accomplish against a stranger and a poor orphan, he would not effect now that he was ruined and without a position, nor perhaps even attempt, against a high and powerful nobleman and a rich and aristocratic heiress. He did not, however, give up the struggle, and if in the eyes of the world he seemed satisfied with his lot, he was secretly plotting the most odious schemes for the satisfaction of his hatred.

He now directed his steps toward the little reception-room, where the members of the club received the visits of strangers. He did not expect to find the cashier whom Kornemann had announced, but in the over-strained situation in which he found himself, the slightest incidents of daily life appeared suspicious to him. He, therefore, gave up the idea of penning an unimportant note which he had thought of sending to some tradesman, in order to find out at once who it was that had called to see him. On entering the reception room he was not a little surprised to find that the loungers on the balcony had told him the truth. It was, indeed, M. Bouscareau who awaited him, leaning upon his stick and his face looking harsher and more surly than usual. With his squat figure, his low forehead, his turned-up lips, and his pointed teeth, he looked like a bulldog ready to bite.

"Good evening, sir," said Noridet drily. "What did you wish to see me about?"

"I wish to speak with you."

"About what, if you please?"

"In the first place, can we be overheard here? Are you sure that we can't?"

"Quite sure, especially if you speak in a low key. But why do you ask me that?"

"I have come to propose to you to join me in revenging ourselves upon the man who has stripped us both of all we possessed." Noridet's eyes flashed, but he restrained himself. He wished to learn what plan had occurred to the cashier. "Don't think that I am like that fool of a Jacques Brossin, who hasn't a particle of courage," resumed Bouscareau. "I don't lick the hand that smites me. I tear it."

"Machiavelli, and Cæsar Borgia, could not have expressed themselves better."

"I don't know either of those two gentlemen," replied Bouscareau, gravely, "but I flatter myself that I can secure my revenge."

"And how?" asked Noridet.

"We must strike the marquis through his daughter. That is his vulnerable point. I shall study her character and habits, and like a spider, weave my web around her."

"But you forget that the marquis has ordered both of us to leave France?"

"No doubt. But we may find a means of delaying our departure. Besides, the authorities will keep me here till Brossin's bankruptcy is settled."

The two scamps were now on the point of coming to a more explicit arrangement, but at this moment there was a knock at the door, and a servant popped his head inside the room. "Excuse me, sir," said he to Noridet, "but a peasant is downstairs who wants to see you on urgent business. He comes from Brittany, he says, and on going to your rooms he heard that you were here. He asked me to hand you this letter."

Noridet took hold of the note which was offered him, wondering what it

all meant. Scarcely, however, had he glanced at the communication than the expression of his face changed. "I must go now," said he to Bouscarreau. "Come and see me in the Rue du Helder, to-morrow. I have something here which will enable us to effect our purpose."

## XXXIII.

It is said that perfect happiness is not to be met with in this world, and yet, at the end of that month of June, it might, it seemed, be found in the very midst of Paris, in a house at the end of the Rue d'Assas. There, still dwelt the daughter of the Marquis de Champtocé. There also the Mornacs seemed to enjoy life to the utmost. The husband looked fifteen years younger than previously, and his wife had grown more active and merry than ever. Even Madame de Mathis, the poor impotent creature, had her share of joy, for her condition was improving, and her physician did not despair of a complete cure.

"The paralysis may vanish quite suddenly," said old Dr. Brias, who had been attending the old lady since the accident at Chevreuse; "any strong emotion, any powerful shock to her mind, whether agreeable or otherwise, would restore her speech and power of motion."

From all this it would appear that Mornacs' dwelling was indeed an abode of bliss. The Marquis de Champtocé, Louise Bernard, and Jean de Monville, did not fail to call every day, and there was constant affectionate intercourse between the Boulevard d'Italie and the Rue d'Assas. The great day was, moreover, drawing near. In another fortnight the lovers would be wedded, for M. Franchard, the notary, had made great despatch with all the formalities and contracts required.

One afternoon all the friends were seated together in the garden. Madame de Mathis was reclining in her invalid's chair, Jean and Andrée sat side by side exchanging loving glances, whilst Madame Mornac talked with a deal of animation about that important subject, the wedding dress. The marquis, a short distance off, looked on with a somewhat anxious face. He alone seemed troubled: "When I think," said he, abruptly, to M. Mornac—the ex-notary sat beside him—"that that vile Noridet, or those scamps, Brossin and Bouscarreau, might disturb all this happiness, I cannot help regretting my indulgence."

"You should never repent having forgiven," said the old lawyer, who was far from imagining the extent of the crimes committed by Noridet, and knew but little either about him or about Brossin and his cashier. "What can these men do to harm you or yours, now that you have cut their claws, and pulled out their teeth?"

"Both teeth and claws may grow again, my dear Mornac, and I ought to have remembered the Italian proverb."

"Yes, I know it: 'When the snake is dead, the poison is dead;' but that is a very unchristian saying. The Brossins will soon be over the frontier, together with Noridet."

"No doubt. Still, I have my worries. Fortoto is in trouble, poor fellow, for his mother, Aurora, refuses to sanction his marriage with Louise. She is a bad, unscrupulous woman, and yet it grieves the poor, good-hearted fellow that she should so persistently hate him and his sweet-heart."

"He is very foolish to let that trouble him. I might force her to consent



to the marriage, but she has disappeared from Montmartre, and so strangely that there are days when I have sad presentiments."

"Come, come, marquis! your children want you," suddenly called out Madame Mornac. "They are sighing on account of your absence."

The good lady was making a very venturesome assertion, for the two lovers were not sighing for any one but themselves in the world. Seated near each other, under the eyes of Madame Mornac, they were solely occupied with their courtship, and the rest of the world did not exist in their eyes. Jean was holding Andrée's hand, and they were looking into one another's eyes, and exchanging words which, like most lovers' talk, was the veriest nonsense to all other ears than their own. Madame Mornac remembered that, in marrying the notary, she had made a "marriage of reason," which had been a very happy one, and so she was strongly opposed to all "violent loves," and could never witness the impassioned interviews of the two "children," as she called them, without a feeling of annoyance. "That is not the way to behave when you wish your happiness to last," she would mutter whenever she saw an affectionate gesture of Jean's, or an ardent glance exchanged between him and Andrée. Her husband, she remembered, had never unsettled his symmetrical white tie by an embrace during the whole time of their courtship, and the behaviour of the young descendant of the companions of William the Conqueror was entirely opposed to all her personal reminiscences.

However, the marquis now drew near, and the conversation became general. M. de Champtocé referred to Fortoto's worries, and after a debate in which Jean and Andrée took a prominent part, the marquis went off, having matters to attend to on the Boulevard d'Italie. The lovers strolled through the garden, and as they passed the gate, they suddenly saw an old man approaching, who appeared to be a beggar. He was dressed in rags of every colour, with the wreck of a hat having a torn brim, which hung down over his nose, while his boots were full of holes, and he leant upon a big stick. In a word, he resembled one of Jacques Callot's vagrants. Nothing was wanting, neither the black bandage over one eye, nor the unkempt grey beard, nor the pouch hanging from his side. This strange-looking fellow had paused upon the pavement in front of M. Mornac's garden, and at sight of him no one could help wondering how it was that such a fellow could wander about Paris without being arrested. Costumes that are over picturesque are not favourably looked upon by the police, and this man seemed likely to be arrested on the mere strength of his civil looks. M. de Monville, however, had a secret sympathy for all whom fate seemed to treat with disfavour, and for all who despised rules as to dress. More than once, as if suffocated by his fine clothes, he regretted the costume which he had worn when only Jack of the Cliffs. He did not despise ragged men, for he looked upon them as independent. Still, it annoyed him that this old fellow should make his appearance while he was talking to Andrée. His bad humour was no doubt visible on his face, for the young girl exclaimed: "The poor man is waiting. Go and give him some money; go quick! I do not wish him to go away empty-handed."

"He does not seem to be thinking of going," said Jean, making haste to do as she asked. "Here, my good fellow," said he, holding out a gold piece to the beggar. But, to his surprise, the old man did not take the money. He merely thrust his hand into his pouch. "Take this," reiterated Jean, whereupon the old fellow held out a paper. "No, no; it is of

no consequence," said M. de Monville, thinking that this was some certificate of good behaviour.

"Read it, sir, read it," said the old man, still without taking the money, and in a deep voice, which seemed, like the letter, to proceed from the depths of his pouch.

Jean took the letter, and, as he did so, the vagrant turned away, and speedily disappeared round the nearest corner, while Jean returned to Andrée, looking at the missive, and believing that he was the victim of some joke, or that the old beggar was either intoxicated or insane. But the young girl saw that the paper bore the address, "Monsieur Alain Plouhinec, Cloars, Brittany," and she started nervously. She knew that Alain Plouhinec had been a dependent of her former suitor, Gontran de Kergas, and, moreover, on glancing again at the superscription, she recognised the handwriting of the lover whom she believed dead. An indescribable scene followed; Andrée half fainted; but at length reviving, she begged Jean to read the letter, which ran as follows:—

"My old Friend,—Time has not softened the horrible grief to which Heaven has condemned me, and since I have been wandering about under a false name, I have more than once cursed—pardon me, my poor Alain—that pious feeling which led you into the vault of the old church in our town of Cloars. Had it not been for you, had it not been for the love you bore your master's son, I should now sleep peacefully in my grave, and should not be bearing in sorrow the terrible burden of life, which every day weighs more and more heavily upon me. Shall I have the courage to journey on to the end? I cannot tell, and that is why I now write to you. I told you when I left you that we should never meet again. I have become accustomed to the thought of dying alone, but it would grieve me to shake off my sufferings without telling you that my last thoughts will bring you to my mind. If this letter is not followed by another, my good Alain, you must forget that you rescued me from the tomb, and believe that I died, indeed, on that fatal day when it was thought I had been cut off from among the number of those to whom it is permitted to love. Farewell once more, my old friend. Think sometimes of him who once was called,

"GONTRAN DE KERGAS."

This missive, which Alain Plouhinec had brought to Paris, hoping to find his master, and dissuade him from committing suicide, for which purpose he had called upon Noridet at the club, had been handed to Jean by Bouscareau, disguised as a beggar, the object being to destroy his and Andrée's happiness by revealing the fact that M. de Kergas was still alive. Although Andrée had not loved Gontran as she loved Jean, the young officer's noble disposition and manly character had impressed her favourably, and the tragic destiny which she believed had befallen him, had ever filled her with sorrow. Jean, who knew the painful story of her earlier betrothal and its result, was stricken with apprehension, for this letter now proved that Kergas was alive, that he loved her still, and meditated suicide. What would she do? What would she decide to be her duty after such a revelation?

The young girl had turned very pale, and there were tears in her eyes. At this Jean fell upon his knees before her, and Andrée, guessing and sharing his painful feelings, had just held out her hands to help him to rise, when Madame Mornac, followed by her husband, appeared at a turn in the path. At the sight of this unexpected and pathetic tableau, the good lady sprang back so suddenly that she almost upset the ex-notary, who was

close to her. "They are crazy!" she cried, in a loud voice, "perfectly crazy, and they ought to be put under restraint! See what a romantic education brings about! They are going to be married in a week, but here they are making love speeches in the open air, and kneeling and tossing their arms about as though they were a couple of melodramatic actors in a theatre!"

"Madame!" began Andrée.

"No! no! it is too much, really too much! A pretty sort of life you'll have together, you two? And you think that I will have anything to do with all this? Why, if Mornac had dared to court me in such wild attitudes as that, I should have pitched my workbox at his head, and broken off the match!"

The impetuous old dame would not have been wrong, after all, for the picture which M. Mornac would have presented, kneeling in a white tie and dress-coat, and indulging in passionate demonstrations, would have been grotesque enough; however, Jack of the Cliffs did not resemble M. Mornac in the least.

"Come, come, my dear," now said the old notary, "pray calm yourself! You reproach these children with behaving badly, and you are doing the same yourself. There is really no great harm in Monsieur de Monville's kneeling at the feet of his future wife. It is not customary when a man is a head clerk, and gets married in order to become a notary; but at Jean's age, and in his position—"

"Be still, Mornac! You make my blood boil with your quiet way of taking things, and your full pardons and plenary indulgences. I know there's no harm in it. It would be a pretty thing if there were any harm! But it is improper, and besides that it is perfectly ridiculous."

The lovers bore these little remarks without wincing. Their hearts were too full of sorrow for them to pay any attention to Madame Mornac's lecturing. Andrée, with a sudden impulse, now went up to her guardian and asked him to read the letter, which he did at once, and then, without a word, he handed it to his wife, who glanced at it, and then exclaimed in her usual impetuous way: "Why, Monsieur de Kergas died, and was buried in Brittany. I don't believe in ghosts. This would be a nice business, I must say! When I think that the beggar who, so you say, handed you this foolish note, pretended that he was a postman from an office in the other world, it is a little too much for my credulity, and you are very foolish to believe in any such thing as this. If I knew that he were anywhere near here, I would go and take him by the collar, and convey him to the station-house myself!"

"There is some abominable plot in all this, but I cannot guess either the originator or the purpose," said the notary.

"The purpose!" exclaimed Madame Mornac—"the purpose is to break off Andrée's marriage with Jean. That's easy to see."

"But for what motive? Who is her enemy?"

"Who? Can you ask? Monsieur Jules Noridet, of course! Monsieur Noridet, who, I shall always believe, cut the rope and tried to drown us both at Schaffhausen! We cannot prove it, but that does not alter the matter. And now, to console himself for not having succeeded, he is trying this way of creating trouble; but he will find out his mistake, for I shall not listen to you this time, as I did in Switzerland, when you prevented me from going to the burgomaster. He shall be denounced!"

"We cannot denounce any body, my dear, till we know the truth. I

think that some wicked man has done all this, but I do not think that the letter is a forgery. Andrée, herself, recognises the writing. This Alain Ploulinec is an old servant of the Kergas family, of whom the poor lieutenant often spoke. But you see that he says: 'If you don't receive another letter from me, you must believe me dead.' It must be that he was thinking of committing suicide. There is some misfortune that we do not know of under all this, for he says also: 'Believe that I died on the day when it was thought I had been cut off from among the number of those to whom it is permitted to love.' He also speaks of a false name which he has been bearing. He must have some powerful reason for hiding himself, and he will not appear again."

"I see how it all is," said Madame Mornac. "Jean was frightened, and I forgive him for his genuflections, and tossing his arms in the air. But Andrée is too sensible a girl to be influenced by all this. She will take my advice, and show the letter to her father. Before settling anything he must be consulted."

"You are right, madame," said Andrée. "I will act as he may request."

#### XXXIV.

It was a great shock to the Marquis de Champtocé to learn of the existence of his daughter's former affianced lover, and at once the singular details of the confession of Pierre Lefort returned to his mind as well as the name of Alain, and he realised that the unhappy recluse of the Rhine had been none other than Gontran de Kergas. M. Mornac, an optimist by nature, believed that the young officer was already dead, for he considered this letter to be a last farewell to the faithful Alain and to life.

"Alive or dead," replied the marquis, "he will never consent to reappear, he has no intention of doing anything to disturb Andrée's peace of mind; still, I must find this unfortunate man, if he still be living," added M. de Champtocé, and he then told M. Mornac the sad story of Gontran de Kergas's premature burial and consequent disfigurement. "And now I think of it," he said in conclusion, "I believe it was he who helped Jean on the night when he was attacked by the two burglars."

The marquis at once set to work to find the young officer, whom he hoped to be able to comfort and reconcile to life, although, both for the sake of Monsieur de Kergas and Andrée, he hoped they would never again meet. He well knew that Gontran himself would rather die than be seen by her whom he so much loved; and he thus hoped that he might persuade the young officer not to remain in France. He desired this for the sake of Jean de Monville, whose brow now wore a cloud, for Andrée had become sad since she had learned the truth respecting the suitor who had always shown himself to be a noble-hearted gentleman, and who had, besides, saved her from a frightful death. After considerable trouble, and through Fortoto, who placed him in communication with an ex-colleague in the police force—a very skilful detective named Jottrat—the Marquis de Champtocé did succeed in discovering that a man who habitually hid his face, which resembled a death's head—at least so said those who had caught a chance glimpse of his countenance—and whose name, or assumed name, was Pierre Lefort, was staying in Paris. Quite unexpectedly, also, and after telling Jottrat that Jules Noridet was supposed to be concerned in

placing Gontran's letter in Andrée's hands, it came to the marquis's knowledge that Aurora, the fortune-teller, was now staying with M. de Mathis's nephew. This knowledge was destined to prove of service in the near future, and as to Pierre Lefort, the marquis determined to visit him at once. "Do you think," said M. de Champocé to Jottrat, "that I shall be able to see Lefort and have a private conversation with him?"

"It can easily be managed, marquis, if he is at home, and that we can ascertain by going to his lodgings. I know where they are, for a very simple reason. Going about with his face muffled up he excited suspicion and was recently arrested; but when he had explained himself he was set at liberty and I saw him home. In fact, I have since had occasion to render him some trifling services, so that I can easily obtain admission."

The detective spoke correctly, and that same afternoon the marquis was ushered into the humble room where the unfortunate Gontran was now living in retirement. He came slowly forward, his head covered as usual by his hood, and with his arms crossed upon his breast like a monk saying prayers. "What do you want with me, sir?" he asked in a deep voice. "I must ask you to be brief, for I do not wish to have any dealings with any one, and but for my regard for Monsieur Jottrat, whom I have now known for some months, I should not have admitted you."

"Don't you know me?" asked the marquis. "It is true that I failed to save you when we both were struggling in the waters of the Rhine, in a desperate effort to reach the shore, but I have not forgotten that you rescued Andrée Salazie, and I cannot thank Heaven sufficiently for the fact that you did not perish on the night when we both came so near death in the burning hut."

"Death would not take me. I reached the shore alive, and have since lived here in retirement."

"This is not all that you have done: you recently rescued a young man, who is very dear to me, from two ruffians who assailed him on the Boulevard d'Italie. But even that is not all that I have come to tell you; I have come to confess to you that I am Albert, Marquis de Champocé, the father of Andrée Salazie, whom you rescued from death—"

"Her father!" cried Gontran de Kergas.

"And I have to tell you that a letter which you wrote to Alain Plouhinec—who has come to Paris in search of you—has, by some mysterious means, fallen into the hands of an enemy of myself and my daughter, and has been sent to her."

"My letter to Alain!—my last letter, in which I told him that I was weary of life! And he had come to Paris to seek me, you say? Poor, faithful heart! But what is this you tell me about her—about Andrée?"

"The man who, as I believe, sent her that letter, is the one who cut the cord which secured the boat on the day when she so nearly perished. He is my bitter enemy and hers, and he wished to kill you, as well as me, in the hut, which he set on fire because you had saved her life."

"I injure no man, and I cannot understand why anyone should try to injure me," replied Gontran de Kergas; "but, since you tell me this, I am willing to believe that there exists a man fiendish enough to threaten Andrée's life, as well as yours and mine. Still, I can guess that there is another object in your visit. You perhaps fear that I may write to Andrée, or in some way trouble her repose—"

"I do not believe that—"

"Trust me, I shall not do so. I had heard of her intended marriage to

Monsieur Jean de Monville—the young man, I believe, whom I found on the Boulevard d'Italie, when he was attacked by a couple of ruffians, and whom I had followed from Monsieur Mornac's house, in order to find out who it was that watched her windows at night-time, like myself, and who, I guessed it, must also love her. But, believe me, I am now as dead to your daughter as to the rest of the world, and since you dread my presence in Paris—”

“Excuse me, my dear friend,” interrupted the Marquis de Champtocé, “I have not said so; and I wish to give you one more piece of information. You were poisoned at Chevreuse, not by eating some poisonous mushrooms, but by the deliberate act of a scoundrel who put poison in the food you partook of.”

“What! what do you tell me?”

“He is the same man who has since tried to murder Andrée—”

“Who is he? who is he?” cried M. de Kergas. “Tell me, that I may, with my own hands, kill him as he deserves!”

“Calm yourself, my dear friend; this wretch is utterly beneath your notice.”

“I will challenge him. He cannot refuse to fight a duel with me.”

“He will not fight—Jules Noridet, for that is his name, and you know him—will not fight; and even should he be willing to do so, you will not consent to face him when I tell you that he is the worst of monsters. He put poison in some rice which you unfortunately partook of, at Chevreuse, poison given to him by a Madagascar negress named Aurora, whose foster son he is. This poison was intended to kill his uncle, Monsieur de Mathis, whose heir he is, or was, for a second and valid will has now deprived him of his ill-gotten millions. This crime, which I have proof of, would long ago have sent him to the scaffold by my testimony alone, but I needed him for a task of just and righteous vengeance. Heaven seemingly has punished me for having let this monster live; but I am now determined to prevent his doing any further harm. Leave him to me. I will punish him as he deserves; as for yourself, you cannot fight with such a scoundrel.”

M. de Kergas did not reply for some moments. Crushed by despair on learning of the marriage of the girl whom he still passionately worshipped, although utterly without hope—shrinking, indeed, as he did, from letting her behold his disfigured countenance—he had hoped for a moment that by challenging the cruel enemy who assailed her, he might find the death he longed for without being forced to seek it in suicide. However, Gontran could not forget that he was a gentleman, and that he must not cross swords with so utterly degraded a being as Jules Noridet. “Be it so,” said he, at last. “I shall go away and leave it to you to punish this man. But you must swear to me that the wretch who has attempted to take Andrée's life shall not escape justice.”

“Gontran, I swear to you that he shall not escape. But before we part you must tell me what I am to tell Andrée for you.”

“Tell her—” began M. de Kergas, but he hesitated; and it was only after a minute's reflection that he finally added: “Tell her that I shall retire to the convent of La Trappe and end my days in praying for her and all who are dear to her.”

This was all. M. de Kergas's resolution corresponded fully with the marquis's wishes and he did not insist any further, but with a great display of feeling bade the young officer farewell.

## XXXV

THE pretty suite of rooms in which Jules Noridet lived, was certainly quite unsuitable as the residence of a sorceress, and yet Aurora, the fortune-teller of Montmartre, had been for two weeks a resident there, spreading out her packs of cards and consulting her raven as fervently as of yore. She did not receive the Clignancourt cooks and the frequenters of the Château Rouge who formed her usual set of "consulting customers;" Noridet would not have tolerated such vulgar beings in his own dwelling; but she still passed her days and nights in consulting her spotted cards, and practising various kinds of magic. Rooms in Paris often have their destiny, just like books,—*habent sua fata*,—and sometimes an apartment with silken hangings, seeming intended for lovers only, will serve as a back-ground and a frame for the darkest scenes of some domestic tragedy. Thus it was with the exquisite sleeping-room which M. Lugos had entered one morning to say to the gay tenant of this cosy nest: "You are a poisoner;" thus it was with the smoking-room, where six months later, Noridet had heard from Alfred Brossin about Jean de Monville and Ménager the money-lender. The blackest plots often have their shape beneath gilded ceilings, just as poisonous plants sprout and bloom in a hot-house.

Aurora had made her appearance one fine morning, dressed in flaring colours, and carrying with her an immense leather bag from which she never parted. Introduced into her foster-son's rooms by the servants' door, she had installed herself, on her own personal authority, in the library, and had made preparations which seemingly announced a determination to remain there some time. Noridet, who had been out when she arrived, had on his return found the sibyl squatting upon a magnificent bearskin with clothing and utensils of all sorts scattered around her. Her cards were before her as usual, and to cap the climax the raven Ghorab was perched upon a bust of Alfred de Musset. A violent scene had taken place, and Noridet had begun by threatening to turn Aurora into the street at once with everything belonging to her; he even declared that he would pitch her out of the window, which pleasing promise however, he failed to effect, and, after an hour's stormy discussion, he had to consent to let the sorceress stay there for the time at least. Aurora gave excellent reasons for having left her former abode. In the first place, M. de Champtocé had discovered it, secondly, Fortoto had come to inform her of his intended marriage with Louise Bernard, and Noridet took special delight in the discovery that she had refused her consent to the match. With his natural wickedness he revelled in torturing his foster-brother and Louise. So he fell in with the ideas of Aurora, and even spent an hour or two with her every day, telling her of his hopes of revenging himself upon the marquis, and even consulting her on great occasions.

In the midst of all her cabalistic nonsense, the fortune-teller did not lack judgment or sagacity, and more than once she told her foster-son what proved to be the truth. Her sojourn in the Rue du Helder did not after all disturb Noridet to any great degree. She went out very seldom, and the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood took her for the young fellow's cook.

She occupied the library and slept on the floor, in Madagascar fashion. The only person to complain was the man-servant, who had to wait upon

the negress, but after a while he was quite won over by her cookery, for, like all of her race, she excelled in the culinary art. There was among her baggage, however, a locked box, which contained nothing likely to be used in gastronomy. She never parted from this portable pharmacy, a perfect arsenal of venomous substances and drugs, enough to have poisoned a whole regiment.

Such was the position of affairs when, on the day after M. de Champtocé's interview with Gontran de Kergas, Noridet paid his daily visit to Aurora. He usually found her occupied in scanning her cards; but, on that morning, she was consecrating her leisure moments to chemistry. Half lying upon some cushions, she was attentively watching a mixture which was cooking in a little pan placed upon a tripod, and heated by a small spirit-lamp. The low table, on which the apparatus stood, had been brought from the East by Noridet, and had, perhaps, once served some sultana. The raven was perched unceremoniously beside the lamp, and seemed greatly interested in the cooking of this witches' broth. He watched the infernal beverage attentively, and from time to time thrust forth his beak with faint croakings of satisfaction.

"What, to the deuce, is there in that pestiferous caldron?" asked Noridet, as he came in. "Will you never get over your ridiculous mania for making poisons?"

"He! he!" laughed the sorceress, "you must not say anything against that, foster-son. That is the best wine in my cellar, and when I have distilled it, and poured it into a vial, no one who partakes of it will ever drink again. That is bottled apoplexy, he! he!"

"Well, why didn't you give a glass of it to the marquis when he went to see you?"

"Talking of him, how do matters progress, foster-son?"

"Not well, and I am getting more and more suspicious of something being wrong. On the day before yesterday, at the club, that Champtocé glanced at me in a way that made me shiver all over."

"Oh! I know how Captain Albert can look. He isn't a man to put off his revenge for a day."

"Who knows?"

"After all, it's no matter; we shall settle him and all his race. But let me finish my work," added Aurora, bending over the pan in which some African herbs were boiling. "Ah!" said she, at last, "it is ready now."

"Come, let your decoctions alone, and do talk sense for once in your life," said Noridet. "What have you to tell me?"

"I have some advice to give you," replied Aurora.

"What is it!"

Instead of explaining herself at once, the sorceress rose from the cushions on which she had been reclining, opened the book-case, and from behind a row of books, drew out two small empty vials, which had been hidden there. Noridet watched her with a sullen look; but without troubling herself about his frowns, she returned to the pan, which she had removed from the fire, and poured its contents into a china bowl; then, when the liquid was almost cold, she began to fill her vials with a little funnel. This operation ended, she slipped the crystal stoppers into the necks, and shook both bottles for a moment.

"This is all that is needed," said she, as she glanced at the fluid which both bottles now contained. "It is as clear as spring water. Look at it, foster-son! It has no taste and no smell. Well! you only have to pour



six drops of it into a cup of coffee to send anyone who drinks it into the other world. He would fall down as though he had been shot through the brain ; and no matter how much the doctors might examine his body after death, no trace of the poison could be found."

"Say at once that it is the poison of the Borgias, and have done with it !" exclaimed Noridet, with contemptuous scorn. "Do you know that you annoy me with your melodramatic speeches ? Instead of praising your messes, you had better tell me how to get out of my false position as regards the marquis."

"Here is the means," said the sorceress, setting the vials upon the table.

"That is of great use, I must say ! Do you imagine that I am again going to run the risk of the criminal court when I am still threatened as regards that matter at Chevreuse ? This Champocé could easily settle me, if I did."

"When does he say that you must be married ?"

"It is on the fifth of next month that I must marry that woman I hate. Oh ! if I could only kill his daughter, that would cause his death."

"That is true ; but she won't die. She will marry Jean de Monville, and be happy in the midst of her family."

"I would rather die than see her happy !" exclaimed Noridet.

"I like to hear you speak like that ! Now, listen to me."

"Speak ; but be brief."

"Andrée Salazie must die this very day."

"Are you mad ?"

"Not nearly as mad as you are, foster-son ; and if you will do as I tell you, I will answer for it that all will be over by to-morrow morning."

"And in the evening I should be arrested."

"No ; you would be on your way to England, and you need not return to France till Captain Albert is buried beside his daughter, and that would soon happen, providing she dies."

"An agreeable prospect," said Noridet, in a surly tone ; for he never spared his nurse his ill-humoured growlings. "Even if I did succeed in poisoning Andrée, supposing it were possible—for I presume that you suggest that I ought to do so by means of your wonderful decoction—"

Aurora nodded.

"Well, then the marquis would accuse me at once ; and even follow me to China, if there were need of it."

"He would not accuse you, if you set to work in the right way."

"My sudden departure would suffice for the authorities to think me guilty."

"Let me explain. You interrupt me constantly. You know Mornac's house ?"

"Yes. You don't intend to advise me to go there, I hope."

"You must go there, and at once."

Noridet made a gesture which signified, "This woman is mad !"

"You must ask to see Monsieur Mornac," continued the sorceress. "You will be told that he is out but will soon return. You must then say that you have come on important business, and that you wish to wait for him. The man servant will probably offer to show you to his private room. But then you must say that you prefer to smoke a cigar in the garden, and he will not object to take you there."

"Very fine, indeed ! and if anything should happen to alter this clever

programme, what of it? If Monsieur Mornac should be at home, for instance, what am I to do then? What if his amiable wife, who execrates me, should meet me walking about among her flower-beds? What if, on turning some path, I meet the marquis or his daughter, or that pretty fellow, Jack of the Cliffs?"

"Nothing of all that will happen, foster-son. I know what I am saying, and I have arranged my plan accordingly. For eight days I have been waiting for a chance like the one which offers itself to-day."

"Did you get your information from your cards?"

"From them and from other sources. The inmates of Mornac's house do not take a step without my knowledge. Besides, you have not heard me out, and you will be forced to confess that you run no risk whatever. When you are alone in the garden you must go softly towards the tall trees at the lower end, on the right, and you will find a lawn with two or three chairs, and a little round table. On the table there will be a decanter of iced lemonade and a glass."

"Better and better," muttered Noridet.

"That is the place where Andrée rests every day, at noon, and you know that at Mauritius the creoles never take their siesta without an iced beverage at hand. Well you must approach the table, pour a few drops from the little vial which I shall give you into the lemonade, and then keep on walking about the garden."

"Admirable!" sneered Noridet; "I must then go away as I came, I suppose? But, admitting even that Mademoiselle Andrée comes at that very moment to refresh herself with your mixture, the man-servant will tell his master that I had been lounging about the garden for half an hour, and before I even have time to reach home I shall have all Paris at my heels."

"On the contrary, foster-son, you must wait for Monsieur Mornac, and as he will arrive in good time, you will have the pleasure of talking with him entirely at your ease in his private room, to which he will, no doubt, conduct you."

"This is curious, indeed! And what am I to tell him when there?"

"Nothing can be easier. You must begin by telling him that you have come to beg of him to intercede for you with the marquis. You must say that you are tired of living, that you repent the past, and that you wish to go away and expiate it, far from France, but that as to Mademoiselle Brossin you find it impossible to love her, and that it is simply cruel to both of you to make you marry her. You must declare that you would prefer to surrender the money which the marquis has promised, and to go and seek your fortune in the colonies."

"What then?" asked Noridet, who already spoke in a different tone from that which he had previously assumed.

"Then, when you find that Monsieur Mornac is softened, you must endeavour to obtain a promise from him to intercede on your behalf, and then go away protesting your good feelings, and repeating that you don't know whether you will have the courage to remain in Paris any longer. I will wait for you here, and we will go off together."

"The plan is less impracticable than I thought at first," muttered Noridet.

"Here is the poison," now said Aurora, holding out one of the two vials. "Everything now depends upon yourself, but you have not a moment to lose."

"The worst that could happen," said Noridet, as if talking to himself,

"would be my meeting some one before taking a stroll in the garden, and then I could still get out of the scrape with the tale I should tell Mornac. The step can't make my situation any worse as regards the marquis, and even if I fail, I shall merely have taken a useless walk."

"You begin to believe, then, that I am not an old idiot, as you, at first, asserted?"

"You are sure that the poison leaves no traces?"

"No more than a bird in the air does, foster-son."

"And its effect is immediate?"

"Like that of lightning."

"But the death of Andrée will be unaccountable."

"Young girls have often fallen dead from drinking cold beverages in the intense heat, such as we have just now. It often happens. Besides, she will probably be alone when this occurs, and it will be supposed that the state of excitement, in which she has lived so many months, has caused her demise."

"Suppose that some one else drinks before she does?"

"Then you will, at least, have an enemy the less. But be at ease as to that. She is too much petted in Mornac's house for any one to touch her lemonade. But I repeat to you once more, it is time to start, if you do not wish to miss this opportunity."

"So be it!" said Noridet, thrusting the vial into his pocket. "The life I lead is unbearable, and I must make an end of it by some change or other. But look at your raven!"

The sorceress uttered a shriek, and ran to Ghorab; but it was too late. The ugly bird had dipped its beak in the china bowl, in which the poison had remained for a moment, and it now lay with its claws in the air. "Ah! I see that the drug is powerful, and I will use it at once," said Noridet, who vanished as he spoke, behind the rich hangings which closed the entrance of the library.

Aurora let her nursling go without even looking at him. She was lost in her grief, and gazed fixedly at her bird. "Ghorab dead!" she muttered, "the cards have said it, I also am about to die."

### XXXVI.

WHILE the sorceress was giving such good advice to Jules Noridet, the Marquis de Champtocé was not losing his time. On the day before he had made an appointment with Jottrat the detective, for nine o'clock, and he had risen at dawn, like a general preparing for decisive action. Things had now come to a point which required that all enemies, avowed or unavowed, should be dealt with effectively. M. de Champtocé had, therefore, invited the detective to call upon him, with the intention of laying before him the crimes and misdeeds of the remorseless scoundrel, with whom he had now been struggling for nearly a year. He had spent a troubled night filled with odious visions. He had seemed to see Noridet crowning his edifice of crime by some deed still more frightful than all the others, and he reproached himself for having so long delayed the murderer's punishment. What did he now care for his revenge upon Brossin and Bouscareau, and all other inferior offenders, in comparison with Noridet? It was the latter who must be dealt with, and speedily, for Andrée's life was in peril, since the failure of the minor revenge, which Noridet had evidently tried to effect by sending her M. de Kergas's letter.

The detective was punctual, and M. de Champtocé began the conversation by clearly setting forth all the facts of the situation. He related without any reserve or ambiguity his own story, and that of Jean de Monville and Andrée, his former wrongs at the hands of Brossin and Bouscareau, and ended by a detailed account of the crimes committed by Jules Noridet.

"I am not surprised at what you tell me concerning this Noridet," replied the detective when the marquis finished. "I did not know that he had poisoned four or five persons and been guilty of three attempts at assassination, besides setting fire to a house, but I was sure as to his immorality. We fellows of the police have long known about the dissipation in which he habitually indulges. His mad expenditure drew our attention to him from early manhood, and two years ago we held ourselves in readiness to prevent him from going too far. In fact we have since wondered how he kept up so ruinous a way of living. Any individual," added Jottrat, "who possesses nothing, and lives as though he were rich, is an object of suspicion to us for that very reason, and so we quietly watch him. Now, this was the case as regards Noridet, and there is plenty of information about him in the notes kept at the Prefecture."

"Your task is all the easier, then," said the marquis much relieved.

"Not so easy as you may perhaps think, sir. The greater the amount of information we possess, the more careful we have to be. The information which we get together concerning a man remains secret until the day when this man gives us a hold upon him by committing some act which is a crime or misdemeanour. As long as he remains without transgressing the penal code, our books keep the secret of his past life. They constitute an arsenal of formidable weapons, but we do not take any of them in hand until war is openly declared upon society."

"What do you wish to arrive at by what you say?" asked M. de Champtocé, with some impatience.

"I wish to show you, sir," replied the detective, without seeming to be surprised by this question, "that it will be very difficult to establish this man's guilt, and that I shall consequently be obliged to act with caution."

"But I am here to attest his crimes; I am ready to give my testimony before a magistrate—"

"Your testimony would doubtless have great weight, but it would not suffice. You doubt me? Well, be kind enough to go over the facts with me. They are as follows: The attempts at Schaffhausen are almost impossible of proof owing to various obstacles, and they could not be inquired into by a French court of law as they occurred in Switzerland. Then the affair on the Monville cliff had no witnesses but yourself and a young man who is closely connected with you, and whose testimony would therefore lose much of its value. The attack to which Monsieur Bernard fell a victim would be still more difficult to prove, for no one saw it, and the sufferer having lost his reason for some length of time, the exactitude of his recollections might be disputed. The poisoning at Chevreuse now remains. As to that, three persons are dead, two others will suffer all their lives from the terrible effects of the drug, but you alone are able to prove that the poison was put in the food. There does not appear to be any other witness of that act. Besides, nine months have elapsed and medical verification has become almost impossible."

"Moral proof abounds, and, besides, the negress Aurora might be forced to confess that she furnished the poison."

"Do you really believe that, marquis? Do you expect to force an avowal from this woman such as would prove her guilt? That is very doubtful, and though I believe that a judge would find serious presumption of guilt in this affair, he would not consider that there was sufficient proof to condemn the criminal. Still I am quite ready to serve you, and I only wish to know how I can best do so."

"I admit the justice of your reasoning," said M. de Champtocé, "and that being so, it is for you to tell me how you think we had better proceed."

"By cunning, in the first place. From this day forth, Noridet will be closely watched. I think that, first of all, we must question the fortune-teller. We know, and I have already told you, that she has left her former abode, and lives at Noridet's rooms in the Rue du Helder."

"Yes, and whenever I think of that, it seems to me that these two monsters must be planning some new crime."

"That is likely enough," quietly replied Jottrat, "but we shall soon settle their little game."

"You consent, then, to act immediately?"

"Before coming here I took proper measures. At the present time three of my agents are watching in the Rue du Helder, and when I go there I shall immediately be informed as to the people who reside at Noridet's. If he himself is absent, the chance will be a good one to interview his foster-mother."

"Can I go with you?"

"Certainly."

"Let us go at once then. I don't know how it is, but I have a presentiment that we may be able to prevent some new disaster."

### XXXVII.

NORIDET had left his rooms in a state of unusual excitement. His cold and calculating nature was scarcely ever stirred, and events of exceptional gravity alone troubled him. Nothing, however, had as yet impaired the truce which the Marquis de Champtocé had granted to his enemies. Henriette's husband-elect had been allowed to live in peace, like the family which he was about to enter. He might already have gone off, unhindered, and have remained abroad with a comfortable though not a large income to live upon. But fifty thousand francs a year, and marriage with Henriette, were not what Noridet wanted. He wished to destroy the Champtocé family, and was mad enough to believe that he might ultimately do so, and wrest the fortune of his uncle Mathis from his aunt by some machination or other. After the scene in which he had been obliged to humble himself before M. de Champtocé, and confess himself conquered, Noridet had passed continually from hope to despair. Bouscareau's offer and the letter from Kergas to Alain had roused him for a moment, but he had concluded that comparatively mild plots, to annoy Andrée, were out of place, and Aurora's diabolic suggestions seemed to offer a better chance of success. To risk all for all seemed to him much better than to continue slowly plotting in the midst of ever-recurring danger. He was almost in the situation of a gambler who, tired of turning over the cards to little or no effect, stakes his all in a single venture.

Leaving the rooms in the Rue du Helder, he hailed a cab which drove him to the Rue d'Assas. It was necessary to act promptly, if at all, and so

he did not lose a moment. He asked to see M. Mornac, and learnt with no little satisfaction that he had gone out. The man-servant who answered the door had no prejudice against Noridet, as he had never before seen him, though he had heard of his name, as that of an elegant young "man about town." He, therefore, made no objections when the stylish-looking visitor asked to be allowed to wait for the notary in the garden. The plan devised by Aurora seemed a good one; at least her information proved correct in every respect. Noridet, let in with the utmost politeness, was left alone near the great lawn which extended far beyond the entrance of the house. He was well aware that there was a chance that Madame Mornac or Andrée might catch sight of him from the windows, and that everything would fail if they saw him. Besides, the notary's wife was quite capable of coming downstairs and ordering him to leave the premises. He did not, therefore, remain in view, and he had a good excuse for strolling under the trees, as the sun was blazing, and with the dog-day temperature no one could object to his seeking a little shade. So he walked stealthily towards the grove at the bottom of the garden, and lit his cigar, by way of putting a good face on the matter, and furnishing an excuse for remaining in the grounds. It was not without violent palpitations of the heart that he turned to the right, in conformity with the instructions of Aurora. The question was whether he would find the second lawn, the table, and the lemonade prepared for Andrée. An oversight or merely some delay on the part of a servant, and all would be in vain. "If the old idiot has made a mistake," thought Noridet, "I must beat a retreat, saying that I have not time to wait."

But the "old idiot" had not made any mistake. On a rustic table a servant had placed some lemonade in a glass bottle, which glittered brightly. A broad-brimmed straw hat and a parasol, which lay upon the grassy bank near by, indicated that the young girl would soon appear.

Noridet accordingly slipped his hand into his pocket where he had placed the vial, and stepped forward so cautiously that there was no sound on the gravel of the walk. It was nearly noon; not a breath of air stirred the leaves, and the birds under the shelter of the high branches had ceased to sing. The poisoner stopped from time to time to peer among the thickets, and to listen for any sound that might reveal the presence of some witness hidden among the acacias; but the silence was profound, and nothing showed that Heaven would intervene to prevent the accomplishment of this crime. Accordingly Noridet darted to the table, poured half of the fluid he had with him into the lemonade, and then quickly retraced his steps without looking behind him. "I have sown the seed of death," he muttered, "and have only to wait till it takes effect."

He now began walking slowly about, taking care to go further and further from the grove. He was somewhat pale, but his limbs did not quiver, and he puffed out the smoke from his cigar with an air of the utmost indifference. He even thought for a moment of changing his plans and going straight off, but this might give ground for suspicion, so he thought it wiser to remain and see M. Mornac. Having resolved upon this course, which required courage, he tried to relieve the tedium of waiting, by composing the homily with which he intended to favour the credulous notary. He had not time to compose much of it, however, for at a turn of the path, on the opposite side of the grove, he met the servant who had admitted him. "Monsieur Mornac has just returned," said the valet, "and is waiting for you in his private room."

This seemed almost magical success, and Noridet began to believe that the fortune-teller must have the gift of second sight. He followed the servant without the slightest hesitation, and saw that his guide did not conduct him past the windows of the house. M. Mornac had perhaps given the servant orders to follow another course. He might not like his wife or his ward seeing such an unexpected visitor. Noridet thought all this as he went along, and he conjectured rightly. Had he looked to the left before entering the house, he would have seen Andrée cross the garden at the moment when he climbed the steps. She was accompanied by Madame Mornac. They reached the garden chairs, and sat down. The poisoner's presence had left no trace, and there was nothing to show that preparations for an odious crime had been made under the shade of the trees. It was beneath these trees that Andrée and her paralytic godmother were in the habit of resting, for on the hottest days it was quite cool there, and the dim shade was quite delightful after the glare of the sun.

Mademoiselle de Champtocé sank down upon a grassy bank, and saying that she was thirsty, she reached out her hand to take hold of the decanter containing the welcome, tempting lemonade.

Had Noridet, who at the moment was repeating cunningly worded phrases as to his repentance into the over-credulous ears of M. Mornac, been able to see Andrée about to raise the poisoned beverage to her lips, he would have felt a thrill to the very marrow of his bones, for the crime which he had premeditated was about to prove successful.

To save Andrée a miracle was needed; and, indeed, it took place, for Heaven intervened. At the instant when her lips were about to touch the glass into which she had poured some of the beverage, a cry of anguish came from the depths of an arbour beyond the bank of turf, and on hearing it, she paused. She thought that she recognized the voice, and she looked at Madame Mornac as though asking her if she were right.

"It sounds like—but no—it is impossible!" exclaimed the good lady.

"Who is there?" asked Andrée, in surprise, and at the same time she replaced her glass on the table.

"Well, I gave orders to place Madame de Mathis's arm-chair in the arbour which she likes so much," said Madame Mornac. "Can it have been my poor friend, Marguerite, who called?—but in that case she must be cured."

These incoherent words escaped the notary's wife, as she darted to the arbour, while Andrée sank upon the grassy bank, overcome with surprise and agitation. Hasty exclamations were presently heard emerging from the arbour, and then a weaker voice was heard. "Heaven grant that it may be true!" cried Andrée, joining her hands; "my godmother seems to be speaking, but can it be possible?"

Her uncertainty did not last long, for a moment later Madame Mornac appeared, pushing before her the invalid chair in which Madame de Mathis was seated. Andrée then fell upon her knees before her godmother, and covered her hands with kisses. The change which had taken place in the old lady's condition would have astonished the most hopeful physician. The light of intelligence had returned to her eyes, the blood circulated freely in her veins, and flushed her cheeks; an expression long unseen had returned to her countenance. Though she had not yet recovered the power of motion, she had recovered a faculty precious above all others. She could speak. To the cry of alarm which she had uttered, she now joined a more precise warning, and, feebly repulsing Andrée's embrace, she articulated these words, which made Madame Mornac start with amazement:

"The poison—throw away the poison!"

"Godmother—dear godmother—you are restored to me—Heaven has heard my prayer!" cried the young girl.

"But what poison do you mean?" asked Madame Mornac.

"What Jules poured out—I was there—I saw all," said Madame de Mathis.

"Jules? What Jules?" repeated the notary's wife, who in her agitation had quite forgotten the Christian name of the man whom she so hated.

"Jules Noridet," sighed the poor, reanimated invalid, and at the same moment tears filled her eyes.

"The monster! the villain! ah! I knew very well that he would begin his bad acts again!"

As Madame Mornac uttered these exclamations, she dashed at the table, and with one blow sent the decanter and the glass rolling among the bushes. Then, as reflection returned, she approached the old lady, and began with her usual volubility: "But it cannot be—he would not have had the impudence to come here. Can it be that Marguerite—"

She paused, but it was easy to see that the thought had crossed her mind that, although poor Madame de Mathis had recovered her speech, she had also lost her mind. "Tell me," she resumed, "how did he get in?—which way did he come?"

"He came alone—he came softly—he did not see me—I did not lose sight of a motion he made—I thought that I should die—the blood rushed to my heart—I tried to cry out—to call him by his name—"

"Merciful heavens! God Himself prevented you from speaking, for if this wretch had seen you he would have strangled you!" cried Madame Mornac.

"Then," continued Madame de Mathis, "he went away—noiselessly as he came—I prayed, and, little by little, it seemed to me that life came back to me—and when I saw our dear girl take up that glass—when I felt that she was about to—to drink her death—my tongue became suddenly free—and I cried out."

"And saved me," said Andrée.

"Saved her!" now said the Marquis de Champtocé, suddenly appearing upon the scene. "What danger has Andrée run?"

"Ah, here you are, marquis!" cried Madame Mornac; "you have come in good time. Just listen to the last exploit of Monsieur Noridet who has got in here to poison us all."

"He!—has he dared—"

"Father, don't you see that godmother is restored to me?" said Andrée.

But M. de Champtocé did not listen to his daughter. His face wore an expression of rage, and he looked about him as though he hoped to find Noridet within his reach. "Where is he?—where shall I find him to crush him like the venomous serpent that he is?" he asked, his words hissing from between his teeth.

"Are you speaking of Monsieur Noridet?" said Jottrat, who now suddenly came up.

"Of course, I am. While we were looking for him at his rooms he came here to try to poison my daughter."

"Your servant has just told me that he is talking with Monsieur Mornac," said the detective, quietly, "this time, at all events, he will not escape punishment for want of proof."

"What! is he here?" exclaimed the marquis.



"The servant told me that Monsieur Noridet came here three quarters of an hour ago, and that after asking for Monsieur Mornac, who was out, he insisted upon waiting for him in the garden."

"The scoundrel! He had his reasons for coming here," said Madame Mornac.

"He did not remain here long, however, madame, for your husband came in almost immediately, and sent word that he was waiting for him in his private room," said Jottrat.

"Well, then," rejoined Andrée's father, in a loud voice, "since he has carried his audacity so far as to come here, he must not be allowed to leave this place alive, and I am going—"

"Excuse me," said the detective, "Monsieur Noridet belongs to the law, now, and I must ask you to let me act alone."

M. de Champtocé would no doubt have insisted upon taking justice into his own hands, but his daughter pointed to Madame de Mathis, who had now risen from her arm-chair, and advanced, supported by Madame Mornac. There followed an affecting scene, which Jottrat witnessed from a corner of the grove, whither he had discreetly retired. It was the first time for many a day that such a happy event had happened, and it was natural enough to devote a few seconds to mutual expressions of delight; however, the police agent did not forget his business, and as soon as the first transports were over, he drew Madame Mornac aside and obtained from her all the information he needed. Then he turned to the marquis, and said: "In less than an hour's time, Monsieur Noridet will be on the way to Mazas prison." And as he spoke he ran across the garden, met the servant, and said to him: "Let me into your master's private room at once."

The servant saw that something serious was the matter, and guessed Jottrat's real profession. So he at once complied. As the detective drew near the door he heard a few words exchanged in an almost friendly tone, but without stopping to listen, he softly turned the handle. His sudden appearance startled both the inmates of the room, and Noridet recoiled on seeing the detective's stern countenance and searching eyes. "Excuse me, sir," said Jottrat, addressing the master of the house; "but Madame Mornac told me that you were here, and I must speak to you at once."

"Allow me to show Monsieur Noridet out, and then I shall be at liberty," replied M. Mornac.

"That is quite unnecessary," said the detective, "for I have come to arrest him."

"To arrest me!" cried the poisoner, who had turned very pale. "What foolish joke is this?"

"I am not jesting, and to show you that I am in earnest, here is the warrant which I am charged with," said the agent, displaying a paper.

"Ah!" exclaimed Noridet, too much terrified to answer.

"Your idea in remaining here was a very stupid one. I did not expect to find you."

"But how did you happen to come here, sir?" asked M. Mornac.

"I came with the Marquis of Champtocé."

"Indeed! Where is he?"

"In your garden, sir. He was waiting to know the result of an expedition which we have both just made, to the Rue du Helder—to the house of this man, Noridet."

"You insolent scamp!" cried Jules.

"We found no one, and I was even afraid that I should not be able to effect what I was charged with, to-day. But fortunately, the marquis thought of coming to inform you of what was going on, and luck has brought our man into the lion's mouth." Noridet was by this time scarcely able to sustain himself. "When I say that we found no one in the Rue du Helder," added Jottrat, "I made a mistake, we found an old African fortune-teller, who knew all about this man, Noridet's doings, for she was his nurse and had been staying with him, for a whole month. Unfortunately, she is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Noridet, without realizing that his emotion betrayed him.

"She was mixed up in most of this man's crimes," continued the detective, looking at Noridet, "and when she saw that her refusals to answer my questions would serve no purpose, and that she should soon find herself before a magistrate, she asked permission to dress properly before going to prison, and under pretence of looking for a handkerchief, opened a drawer, took out a small bottle and swallowed the contents."

"It was poison?" asked M. Mornac.

"Of the first quality. She at once fell upon a dead raven which already lay on the floor."

"She did not confess, then?" thought Noridet, "they have no proofs."

"Your house is guarded outside, sir," continued the detective, addressing M. Mornac. "But my men know their business, and there will be no scandal. However, I have forgotten to tell you the most interesting thing of all. Just before the old negress died, she turned to the Marquis de Champtocé, and said: 'Captain Albert, have you any message for Andrée Salazie? I shall see her in the other world.'"

"What did she mean?" cried Mornac.

"We did not know at first, but we know now. We already had poisoning, murder, setting fire to buildings, quite a splendid list for the criminal court as it was; but now we have proof that a fresh crime has just been committed here in your house."

"Andrée is dead, then!" thought the prisoner with savage joy.

But at this moment the door opened and Madame Mornac appeared, while behind her walked Madame de Mathis, leaning on the arm of the marquis. At the sight of his aunt, who seemed to have risen from the very grave to accuse him, Noridet guessed what had happened. She had been in the grove, and had seen him pour the poison into the decanter. The marquis now stepped forward. "Listen! all who are here," said he. "This man has deserved the scaffold many times, but he might even now have escaped for want of proof had not God raised up a witness who saw him pour out the poison intended to kill my daughter."

"Yes, it was I who saw him," said Madame de Mathis, in a clear and resolute voice.

This voice, which he had not heard since the day on which he had committed his first crime, fell upon the murderer's ears like a death knell.

"She speaks!" he muttered, "she was there—hidden—she saw all—" His hair rose up on his head, his eyes seemed to start from their sockets, and he recoiled towards the wall. Jottrat stepped towards him. "Stand back, you blackguard!" shouted the poisoner. "No man shall take me living." And he swiftly carried to his lips the vial, which was still half full, and then dropped dead upon the floor.

"Justice is done!" said the detective.

"Ay, God has punished him!" added the Marquis de Champtocé.

Three days after the death of Noridet, M. de Champtocé received a visit from Jottrat the detective. M. de Kergas, worn out by long suffering, had been found dead in his bed, and though at first a case of suicide had been suspected by the authorities, the doctors having made a post-mortem examination of the body, formally certified that the cause of death was perfectly natural—being simply disease of the heart. Andrée was now quite free to marry Jeau, the first and only man whom she had truly loved. The wedding took place at Biville, in July, and furnished an occasion for rejoicings throughout the district. As for M. de Champtocé, his mind was now at ease. His foes could no longer harm him. M. Brossin, who no longer claimed to be a baron, had obtained a bankrupt's certificate, like a mere grocer who has failed in business, and only thought of ending his days in peace, thanks to the marquis's generosity. The income derived from Bouscareau's million and which had been intended for the unhappy Henriette, was allotted to her parents, as the young girl absolutely refused to marry, and M. de Champtocé would not retain it. Thus the ex-banker, with an income of fifty thousand francs, repaired with his wife and daughter to a little town in the north of Germany, where he met with more respect than he deserved. It was rumoured that he still did some money-lending business with the Frankfort Jews, but no one pays any attention to usury in Prussia providing one's thalers are genuine. Madame Brossin amused herself by displaying her eccentric toilets to the natives of the fatherland, while, as for Henriette, she was vainly courted by a burgomaster and two landwehr officers, in succession. However, she preferred a life of single blessedness. Her brother Alfred is travelling for a Rouen firm. He does not succeed in selling his employer's stuffs very well, but he astonishes his customers by his gorgeous attire, and charms the ladies by stories of his success in Paris as a man of fashion. During the Franco-German war he took care to go to England. It would have been too painful to choose between France and the adopted country of his highly respectable family. Fortoto, on the contrary, enlisted after the battle of Reichshoffen, was wounded while with the Army of the Loire, and received a medal for his bravery. His marriage took place a month after that of his friend Jean, and he lives with Louise, his wife, in a cosy little cottage near Monville. He is Jean's agent in Normandy, and his wife has given him a pretty little girl. Bernard, the faithful groom, died at the Black Rock, and M. de Champtocé closed his eyes. Alain Plouhinec also is dead, having been sadly affected by the fate of his master, Gontran de Kergas, and he sleeps beside him in the vaults of Cloars Carnoët.

But if the old ones have departed in peace, there is a young generation springing up. Andrée and Jean have two fine sons, the elder of whom was born while his father was a prisoner of war at Nuremberg in 1870. The descendant of William the Conqueror's knights could not be false to the blood of his ancestors; he commanded a company of sharpshooters which fought gloriously in the Vosges for a time, but, eventually, he was overpowered by the foe and had to surrender.

The existence of the loving pair is now a calm and happy one. They divide their time between Paris and their estates in Normandy, feeling most happy at the new château of the Black Rock, for fashionable life does not suit either of them. Jean is fond of sport, and Andrée visits the poor people

on the domain which is now most extensive, for her husband having purchased the property of Baron Brossin, has become one of the largest landholders in the department. If it were not for the Mornac family, which seldom travels, Andrée would never leave the coast of Normandy, but she is too fond of her old friends not to stay three months or so with them during the winter. The old notary is troubled with gout, but his wife is as lively as ever, and flies into a tantrum more frequently than her physician thinks prudent, for he tells her that she may some day go off in a fit of apoplexy. But, perhaps, Dr. Brias will persuade her to come and stay at La Beaudonnière altogether. Meantime she helps Andrée in bringing up the children, after her own fashion, and scolds everybody, more or less.

The Marquis de Champtocé lives during a part of the year on the Boulevard d'Italie, and the rest of the time at his daughter's château. He also is happy, for Heaven has blessed all those whom he loves, and the youngest of his grandsons bears his name. As for Bouscareau, an American newspaper lately reported that he had been lynched in California after committing some fresh piece of rascality.

THE END.



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